

# **THE AKALI STRUGGLE**

**A RETROSPECT**



**MOHINDER SINGH**















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A Jatha of Akali volunteers marching to Guru-ka-Bagh on 25 October, 1922.

Courtesy Sir George Dunnett, London



*I rejoice that I am being tried for a cause which the Sikhs have made their own. I was in jail when the Guru-ka-Bagh struggle was gallantly fought and won by the Sikhs. I marvelled at the courage and sacrifice of the Akalis and wished that I could be given an opportunity of showing my deep admiration of them by some form of service. That opportunity has now been given to me and I earnestly hope that I shall prove worthy of their high tradition and fine courage.*

*Sat Sri Akal*

*Jawaharlal Nehru*

*Central Jail  
Nabha*

*25 September 1923*







## PREFACE

While recent developments in Panjab have attracted wide attention from media at home and abroad little has been done to go into the genesis of the problem and explain the essentially peaceful nature of the Akali struggle in the past. A revised and updated version of the author's doctoral work earlier published under the title of *The Akali Movement* (Macmillan, 1918), the book tries to explain the essentially non-violent nature of the Akali struggle. The study shows how the Akali leaders in the past succeeded in channelising the popular religious upsurge during the Gurdwara reform movement (1920-25) into a powerful instrument for India's struggle for freedom and brought the Sikh community into the mainstream of Indian nationalism. Three distinct features of the past struggle made it more effective than its later manifestations in the form of struggle for Punjabi Suba and more recent Akali agitation (1928-44). The first was that the Akali leadership realised the value of press and public opinion. They not only started an English daily, *The Hindustan Times*, in addition to two vernacular papers, *The Akali* (Urdu) and *Akali te Pardesi* (Punjabi), but also carried with them the non-Sikh population and the nationalist leadership. The second was that from the very beginning they eschewed violence and quickly disowned the violent activities of the splinter group, the Babbar Akalis. And thirdly the movement was never allowed to take a communal turn.

In total contrast the struggle for Punjabi Suba started on a negative note with the Punjabi Hindus disowning their mother tongue and Akali leaders making no serious effort to win them over. While some of Master Tara Singh's utterances in course of Punjabi Suba agitation had created serious doubts



and stiff opposition, the demand found acceptance only after Sant Fateh Singh injected a secular note into the agitation spearheaded by Master Tara Singh by emphasising that the "Akali leadership was not seeking a Sikh majority area" and the demand was based on "purely linguistic consideration". Similarly the main cause of the failure of the recent struggle was the inability of the Akali leaders to unite on a commonly agreed programme and carry press and public opinion with them. Inept handling of the situation by the government has created more problems than solving the one created by Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale.

The extant literature on the Movement has not been able to do full justice to the subject as it has either ignored the Akali contribution to the political struggle in the province by depicting it as a 'mere movement of religious reform' or allowed the biased opinions of the authors to dominate their critical and objective judgement. With the exception of Sohan Singh Josh's, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, Navyug Publishers, Delhi, 1944, in which an attempt has been made to project the political aspect of the Movement along with its religious achievements, the only two other important works are, Teja Singh's *Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening* and Ruchi Ram Sahni's *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines* (edited by Dr. Ganda Singh). These depict only a part of the religious struggle with a somewhat pro-Akali bias.

Biographies and commemoration volumes on some of the important Akali leaders as also the accounts of the national leaders and the British officials directly or indirectly concerned with the Movement, too, do not give an objective account of the Akali struggle. Similarly, a large number of Panjabi pamphlets, tracts and other popular forms of literature, written during or after the Movement, are more in the nature of emotional and religious appeals and rather exaggerated and involved account of the authors' own sufferings and contributions to the Akali struggle than accounts of the Movement itself.

Similarly, in the official records, C.I.D. reports, confidential memoranda and press communiques, etc., the Akali activities have either been underrated or overstated. On the one hand, the Panjab Government in its reports to the Vice-



roy of India described the situation in the province as 'normal and under control', while on the other, in order to justify its repressive measures against the extremists in the Akali camp, it charged them with 'entertaining political designs under the cloak of religion with the ultimate object of subverting the British rule and re-establishing the Sikh Raj'. In spite of the Akalis amply demonstrating their strict adherence to the vow of non-violence at Nankana, Guru-ka-Bagh, Jaito and other places, and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee's open and repeated dissociation from the terrorist activities of the Babbar Akali militants, the official machinery continued to charge the Akali leadership with 'maintaining secret contacts with the authors of Babbar outrages' and with having associations with the revolutionaries in Bengal, Afghanistan, Turkey and the Communist International. It was mainly on the basis of these 'charges' that the Panjab Government described the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal as 'Organisations of disorder, working towards treasonable ends', declared them 'unlawful associations' and tried their leadership on charges of 'treason against the King-Emperor'.

But an objective and dispassionate study of the Movement reveals that it was neither a mere 'Movement of Gurdwara reform' as is asserted by some of the pro-Akali writers, nor merely an 'organisation working towards treasonable ends' as alleged by the government agencies. It was a peaceful struggle of the Akali reformers directed against the Mahants, priests and other vested interests in the Sikh shrines on the one hand, and against the repressive administration in Panjab on the other. There is, therefore, the need to re-assess and re-evaluate the role of the Akali Movement and to bring to light its notable contribution to the struggle for freedom in India.

The revised version contains ten chapters and X Appendices. In the first chapter, the origin and evolution of the institution of the Gurdwaras, their early management, introduction of hereditary control by the Mahants and the infiltration of the evil practices which led to attempts at purification, have been discussed in detail. Brief mention has also been made of the socio-economic and political factors which directly or indirectly influenced the Akali Movement and helped in widening the scope of its activities.



The second chapter delineates the Akali struggle for religious reform. Rather than dwelling on a mere narrative of events and managerial overhaul of over two-hundred Gurdwaras, only some case studies of a few of the more important historic shrines have been made. The chapter also describes how the Mahants of smaller and less important Gurdwaras yielded to the Akali pressure and how the authorities re-adjusted their policies to combat the Movement.

The third chapter describes how the Akalis widened the scope of their activities. By entering the political arena over a relatively minor local issue, they eventually attracted the attention of national leaders and soon became an important factor in the struggle against British imperialism.

Chapter four has been devoted to a discussion of the Akali activities in the Sikh states—particularly the Akali involvement in the Nabha affair and the oppressive measures initiated by the Sikh princes to 'combat this dangerous movement'.

In chapters five and six are discussed in detail origin and development of two of the most powerful Sikh bodies, the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal. Herein is delineated in detail the official policy in dividing the Akali leadership and Akali leaders' capability in frustrating the official design. In total contrast the present Akali leaders have not only been working at cross-purposes but have more easily fallen in the trap of the ruling party at the centre.

The activities of the Babbar Akali terrorists figure in Chapter seven. On the face of it, inclusion of the Babbar Akali movement may seem rather out of place in the present work as neither the objective nor the *modus operandi* of the Babbars was in tune with the Akali programme, nevertheless it has been included because a comparative study of the terrorists in the past would show that the Babbars never resorted to killing of innocent civilian population and other criminal acts which are now associated with terrorist activities in Panjab.

In Chapter eight several attempts at a legislative solution of the Akali problem and the causes of their repeated failures are discussed. Also Sir Malcolm Hailey's devious manoeuvres



with a view to forcing the Akali leadership to come to terms with the Government are presented in a lucid manner.

Chapter nine discusses the impact of the Akali movement on the future politics of the Sikhs and how, in spite of some minor differences here and there, the Akali leaders cooperated with the Congress in country's struggle for freedom and finally cast their lot with India at the time of partition in 1947.

In the tenth and final chapter a comparison is made between the Akali leaders in the past and present. A careful study reveals that the leaders in the past could rise above petty jealousy and personal ambitions and thus presenting a strong leadership to the Sikh community.

In the present work an attempt has been made to re-assess and re-evaluate the role of the Akali Movement on the basis of fresh evidence found in official records, private and family papers and the once-proscribed literature now available in India and the United Kingdom. Both the official as well as the Akali sources on the subject have been studied. In the event of conflicting reports, misrepresentations, exaggerations and, in some cases, deliberate suppression of facts in the official accounts as well as popular pamphlet literature on the subject, an effort has been made to verify the facts and figures by comparing these with additional and independent evidence. Since Panjabi words like Gurdwaras, Mahants, Morchas and Jathas occur too frequently, they have been italicized only in the first instance with explanations provided either in the notes or the glossary.

The project was fraught with many inherent difficulties. The original records of the Panjab Government were for most part left at Lahore at the time of partition of the country and no access to these was possible. The S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal, the two bodies which launched and directed the Akali struggle for five years, also failed to preserve most of their records. But the author's keen desire to take up the challenge and the constant support and encouragement of his teachers and friends had been so compelling that undaunted by the fact of the non-availability of various sources under one roof, he moved from place to place to complete the task. The project required visiting all possible individuals and



institutions and locating and copying whatever relevant material could be obtained. During these hunts for source material, the author was able to collect a good deal of information from official files, Native Press Abstracts, District Gazetteers, Census Reports, Notes from the Army Staff, Fortnightly and Secret Reports, Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Panjab and the Legislative Assembly of India, etc. Old issues of various native and foreign newspapers available in India and abroad too have been of great use.

Similarly, the India Office Library, the British Museum and the British (Newspaper) Library, London, have proved rich repositories of source material on the subject. Private and family papers of Sir Malcolm Hailey, General Birdwood, Sir James Dunnett, Sir. H.W. Emerson and a number of other British officials directly or indirectly connected with the Akali Movement provided valuable and authentic material. The Hailey Papers, in particular, have been very useful. Out of thirty-six voluminous files comprising some four thousand pages, most of them pertain to the Akali Movement. These papers include not only the correspondence between Hailey and other British officials and nationalist leaders, but also top secret and confidential reports, telegrams, press communiques, minutes of various meetings and cuttings from native and foreign newspapers.

Old issues of the *Civil and Military Gazette* have proved useful in studying the details of the official policy and the activities of the Mahants, the Sikh Sudhar Committees and other anti-Akali elements. At the British Museum a large number of popular Panjabi pamphlets on the Movement banned at the time by the government but now available there in the section on Proscribed Indian Books could be consulted. The need to consult the private collections of almost all the important officials concerned with the Movement helped in locating a number of families with useful material. Private papers of some prominent national and Akali leaders have come handy and interviews with a number of people connected with the Movement who are still living have been of inestimable value. The author owes a deep debt of gratitude to the authorities of the National Archives of India, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, the Panjab State



Archives, the Punjabi University Library, Patiala; the Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College and Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar; the India Office Library, the British Museum, the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, the South Asia Centre, Cambridge, the U S. Congress Library, Washington, D.C, and to Sir George Dunnett, Mrs. J B. Shearer and Mr. G.H. Emerson for providing access to their valuable collections

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New Delhi,

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Evolution of the Institution of Gurdwaras

Sikh shrines, popularly called *Gurdwaras* or *Dharamsals*<sup>1</sup>, have played a vital role in shaping the course of events of the five-hundred-year old history of the Sikhs and in the development of the Sikh religious tradition. An important part of the Sikh triad—the Guru, the *Granth* and the Gurdwara—these temples have been traditionally the centre of the religious, social, cultural and political life of the Sikhs. Established by Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, as centres of religious activity and social and moral instruction, and for providing food and shelter to the poor and the needy, the history of their origin and development is as old as that of the Sikh faith itself.

As the unity of the Godhead and brotherhood of mankind were the basic tenets of the faith of Guru Nanak, special attention was paid by him to the establishment of the twin institutions of *sangat* and *pangat*<sup>2</sup> to translate his teachings into practice and to do away with the existing distinctions of castes and classes, of high and low, of the rich and the poor. Guru Nanak left behind him a *sangat* wherever he went with the injunction to build a *Dharamsal* for the purpose of meeting in a common forum<sup>3</sup>. These two institutions thus became 'Nanak's laboratories for both the demonstration and the practice of his teachings.'<sup>4</sup> Therein the Guru's Sikhs<sup>5</sup> met daily in the mornings and in the evenings to hear a recital of the Guru's teachings and to sing his hymns.<sup>6</sup>

These *Dharamsals* became meeting places for the discussion of general problems concerning the welfare of the Sikhs.



Gradually, they developed into centres of education and higher learning, shelters for the poor, the needy and the orphans and as resting places for travellers. Also it was in these congregations in the Dharamsals that the followers learnt practical lessons in Sikhism and freed themselves from the prejudices of caste and *varna*. Mohsin Fani, the author of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahab*,<sup>7</sup> had seen the Sikh religion in practice at Kiratpur under the direct guidance of the sixth and the seventh Gurus, Hargobind and Har Rai, in the forties of the seventeenth century. According to him the Sikhs ignored the monopoly of the Brahmins in social and religious matters and men from all the four varnas freely entered the Sikh Dharamsals and partook of the sacred *prasad* and free meal served in the *Guru-ka-langar*.<sup>8</sup>

Each sangat was placed under the charge of revered leader appointed either by Guru Nanak himself or nominated by the congregation in cases where it was not practicable for the Guru to do so personally. The twin institutions of sangat and pangat were continued by the successors of Guru Nanak. The third Guru, Amar Dass (1479-1574), further extended the work of propagation by setting up twenty-two *Manjis*<sup>9</sup> in different areas. In addition to the work of propagation of Sikhism, those placed in charge of various Manjis were also required to collect the contributions offered by the devotees and to pass them on to the Guru's headquarters.

In view of the increasing need for money to carry out the work on the holy tanks and the development of the new town of Amritsar, the fourth Guru, Ram Dass, established a new Order of Sikh preachers called *Masands*.<sup>10</sup> The Masands were full-time religious preachers who, in addition to the propagation of the Sikh faith, were also required regularly to collect the subscriptions from the devotees in their respective areas. At the end of the year, on the Baisakhi day, they visited Amritsar to render an account of the offerings received by them and to report on the progress of the propagation work. The fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, further elaborated and reorganised this new Order of Masands. He also ordered that in future every Sikh was to set aside *dasvandh* (one-tenth) of his income for the Guru's fund and to remit it through an accredited Masand who, along with the sangat of his area, was to visit



and present the collection to the Guru in person on the Baisakhi day.<sup>11</sup> These measures, apart from ensuring a regular flow of offerings for the construction of the city and the temple at Amritsar, also resulted in the emergence of a larger number of new sangats in the country. From Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of the third, fourth, fifth and sixth Gurus, we learn that the number of the Sikhs had been steadily increasing and during the days of Guru Arjan Dev, they became a powerful force with a distinct social and moral code.<sup>12</sup>

These Masands, together with the sangats, formed the pivot of the Sikh organisation serving the Sikh cause creditably for quite some time. They were chosen for their piety, integrity and high position and were honorary officers. But during the days of the seventh Guru, Har Rai (1630-61), due to his absence from the main centres of Sikh activity and also due to the hostility of the disappointed claimants to the *Gurugaddi*, the Masand system decayed. During the brief pontificate of the child Guru Harkishan (1656-64), the Masands came out in open support of Ram Rai and other pretenders to the gaddi. By the time of Guru Tegh Bahadur's succession, the Masands had become so audacious as to deny the Guru entry into the Hari Mandir at Amritsar.<sup>13</sup> 'The Masands began to beat and plunder poor Sikhs and threatened with the Guru's curse all who resented their conduct . . . They became proud and rebellious . . .'<sup>14</sup> Thus when the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, found that the Masands, instead of propagating the Sikh faith and forwarding the collections to the Guru—the purpose for which their Order was created—were misusing the offerings and had become forces of disruption in the Sikh community, he abolished their Order.<sup>15</sup> The Guru even commanded his followers not to have any kind of association with the Masands and ordered 'henceforth the Sikhs should themselves present their offerings, and that the employment of the Masands for the purpose shall cease'.<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with the Sikh tradition, in the earlier days the priests or other persons placed in charge of various sangats or Dharamsals, following the advice of Guru Nanak,<sup>17</sup> did not look upon the offerings as their personal property. Instead, they utilised them for the purpose of running free kitchens and other similar works for the welfare of the community. Even



later traditions highlight some of the priests such as Bhais Lakha Singh, Bhagat Singh and Suba Singh having refused personal *jagirs* offered to them by various Sikh chiefs.<sup>18</sup>

### **Gurdwaras Pass into the Hands of the Mahants**

During the early eighteenth century, after the arrest and the subsequent execution of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716, and till the rise of the Sikh *Misaldars* later in the century, there occurred large-scale persecution of the Sikhs at the hands of Emperors Bahadur Shah and Farrukh Siyyar and their Governors in the Panjab, Abdus Samad Khan, Zakaria Khan, Yahya Khan and Mir Mannu,<sup>19</sup> and later at the hands of the Abdali invader Ahmad Shah from 1748 to 1767. As large number of Sikhs along with Sikh preachers were forced into exile, the Sikh shrines passed into the control of the *Udasis*<sup>20</sup> or those who professed Sikhism but did not strictly conform to its outward symbols and could, thus, escape persecution. The Udasis in charge of various Gurdwaras at this time rendered an important service to the Sikh religion by keeping the Gurdwaras going. They were highly respected as men of high moral character and integrity. They were also well-versed in the Sikh scriptures and devoted themselves chiefly to reciting and expounding the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.<sup>21</sup> Most of the Udasis, who looked to ecclesiastic jobs in different Gurdwaras, were not attached to any particular shrine or to its wealth and property but moved from place to place. There were, however, some who established institutions, admitted *chelas* or followers and became heads of their *deras*, *akharas* and Gurdwaras and came to be known as Mahants.<sup>22</sup> In the earlier stages, these Mahants enjoyed the confidence and reverence of sangats of their areas and followed the advice and warning of Guru Nanak not to covet the offerings. They also warned their *chelas* at the time of admission into their order to 'avoid two deadly temptations—gold and women.'<sup>23</sup> These Mahants also nominated their successors to the gaddis. Their nominees were accepted by the sangats as both the Mahants and their *chelas* enjoyed popular esteem and confidence. But this tradition of purity and austerity seems to have deteriorated as a result of the increase in their income derived from revenue-



free jagirs bestowed on most of the historic shrines by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and other Sikh Misaldars.

### **Corruption in the Sikh Shrines**

The rise of the powerful Sikh Misaldars in the late eighteenth century and the subsequent coming into political power of Ranjit Singh in 1799 A.D. led to the institutionlisation of the Sikh religion, the introduction of complicated rites and ceremonies in Sikh religious practices and the emergence of rich and powerful Mahants. Almost all the well-known Gurdwaras were endowed with rich tax-free jagirs by the Sikh Misaldars and later by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. With the sudden increase in the income of the Mahants of some important Gurdwaras, there came a change in the style of living of some of them. Still, as long as the income from the jagirs was small, the Mahants consulted the Sikh sangats of the area in the management of the shrines and the endowments attached to them. But with the opening of a network of canals in the Panjab during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an enormous increase in the value of the jagirs. As a result, the Mahants and their growing flocks began to convert the trust property of the Gurdwaras into their personal possessions. This was in flagrant disregard of the injunctions laid down by the Sikh Gurus and Sikh scriptures.<sup>24</sup> Gradually, the Mahants and their chelas began to live a life of luxury and dissipation verging on depravity.

### **Religious, Social and Political Awakening**

Though after the annexation of the Panjab to the British Empire in 1849, most of the Sikh shrines had passed into the control of the hereditary Mahants and the Government-nominated managers and custodians and the religious leaders of the Sikh community had fallen prey to a number of social evils, no organised movement of reform could be launched against them for want of a general awakening among the Sikhs. The Akali struggle for reform in the early twentieth century arose from such purely provincial movements as the Nirankari, the Namdhari and the Singh Sabha in conjunction with all-India movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Dev Samaj and the Arya Samaj. The



increasing political consciousness and response to nationalist upsurge throughout the country also played a large part. It was the cumulative effect of these internal and external forces which created an awakening among the people in the Panjab and also the desire among the Sikhs to reform their shrines.

## **Social and Religious Reform Movements**

### *I. The Nirankari Movement*

As mentioned earlier, the first traces of relapse of the Sikh faith were noticed during the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule in the Panjab. Baba Dayal<sup>25</sup> was the first among the Sikh religious reformers to have preached against the evils that had slowly crept into the Sikh social and religious life. He preached against idolatry, worship of graves, tombs and trees and belief in other complicated Brahmanical rites and ceremonies and exhorted his followers to worship one *Nirankar* (God).<sup>26</sup> Though Baba Dayal was able to attract a number of followers, known as 'Nirankaris' because of their belief in one Nirankar and who followed Sikh ceremonies in birth, death, marriage and other social usage, yet his movement could not make a very wide impact on the Sikh masses who still lacked education and awakening.<sup>27</sup>

### *II. The Namdhari Movement*

The Namdhari movement, popularly known as the Kuka movement, made its appearance next. Started by Bhagat Jawahar Mal and Baba Balak Singh,<sup>28</sup> the movement became a powerful force of religio-political revival among the Sikhs under one of the latter's disciples, Baba Ram Singh.<sup>29</sup> Baba Ram Singh particularly enjoined upon his followers the worship of one God through prayer and meditation. The *Rehatnamas* (moral codes) prepared and enforced by him exhorted all his followers to be engaged at all time in the worship of God<sup>30</sup>. He also preached against social evils such as the caste-system, female infanticide, early marriage and barter of daughters in marriage and popularised simple and inexpensive *Anand* marriage.<sup>31</sup> The teachings of Baba Ram Singh seem to have had a wide appeal to the Sikh masses. Contemporary



European officials viewed the growing popularity of Baba Ram Singh's mission with serious concern.<sup>32</sup>

Though Baba Ram Singh's mission was specially marked by teachings of righteousness, toleration and mercy yet some of his followers got out of control and in a fit of religious frenzy committed certain excesses which resulted in a clash with the Government.<sup>33</sup> Some of his more fanatic followers who became excited over the killing of cows, murdered the butchers at Amritsar, Raikot and Malerkotla and were, as a punishment, blown off from the cannon's mouth<sup>34</sup> Though there is a difference of opinion among the scholars as to whether the movement was religious or political, there is no denying the fact that the official action against the Kukas created great hatred for British rule in the minds of the people in the Panjab which helped prepare the ground for the subsequent religio-political struggle of the Akalis in the early twentieth century.<sup>35</sup>

### *III. The Singh Sabha Movement*

The year following the persecution of the Kukas and the suppression of their movement saw the birth of the Singh Sabha (1873 A.D.). The Singh Sabha movement and its activities had a much wider appeal to the Sikh masses and, consequently, made a far greater impact. The promoters of the Singh Sabha movement, most of whom belonged to the educated class, were connected with other socio-religious movements in the Panjab and were aware of similar movements in the country. They ascribed the corruption in the Sikh religio-social life to the lack of education among the Sikhs. They believed that religious reformation could be brought about only when the masses were made aware of their cultural heritage. The movement gained quick support from the Sikh elite and such prominent Sikh scholars of the time as Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Kahan Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh and Professor Gurmukh Singh joined the ranks of the Singh Sabha.<sup>36</sup>

Though the Singh Sabha aimed mainly at religious reform through the spread of education and consciously refrained from discussing political questions or in any way incurring the displeasure of the British rulers, the religious propaganda of some of its preachers had marked political overtones. For instance,



when it was argued that vicious social customs and the neglect of religion and education were the direct causes of the political downfall of the Sikhs, most of the preachers put it as an axiom that 'never had the Sikh nation fallen so low or was in so wretched a plight as during the British rule.'<sup>37</sup> And again, 'never was the education', they argued, 'so backward, temporal resources so straitened and disease and poverty so rampant' <sup>38</sup>

Following perhaps the advice of the Singh Sabha leadership who either because of their own vested interests as landed magnets or because of their conception of the interests of the Sikhs did not want to incur the displeasure of the British rulers, these *Updeshaks* did not hold the British Government directly responsible for the manifold social and religious ills; but it was difficult to totally dissociate 'the idea of responsibility of the Paramount Power from the deplorable state of affairs that was depicted by these preachers.'<sup>39</sup> While referring to the halcyon days of Ranjit Singh's rule in the Panjab, they compared the present degraded condition of the Sikhs with the past hardships under the Mughals. It was suggested that this similarity in conditions under the Mughals and the British 'was due to the similarity in causes'.<sup>40</sup>

However, the major contribution of the Singh Sabha leadership lay in the creation of a network of Khalsa schools, colleges and other centres of learning. The Singh Sabha leaders felt that the spread of education among the Sikhs needed the help and friendship of the British rulers. They, therefore, sought the patronage of the Viceroy and other British officials. Soon after the establishment of the Khalsa Diwan, Lahore, an active campaign was started for the foundation of a central college for the Sikhs around which was to be organised a system of schools in the outlying districts. Educational activities of the Singh Sabha received ready support and patronage from the Government of India and the British officials in the Panjab. It was with this assistance from the British officials and the rulers of the Sikh princely states that the Khalsa College was founded at Amritsar in 1892.

Though the promoters of the Khalsa College and their British patrons founded the college for purely educational advancement, the students and some of the teachers there could



not escape the influence of the prevailing political unrest in the province and the growing movement of nationalism in the country. The C.I.D. officials reported to the authorities that the Khalsa College had, by 1907, 'become an important centre for inculcating national feelings among the students'.<sup>41</sup> It was reported that some of the teachers were addressing 'openly seditious lectures' to their students and instilled anti-British feelings in their minds'.<sup>42</sup> In any case, the teachers of the college had failed to 'mould students into loyal subjects of the British crown'.<sup>43</sup> It was perhaps due to the influence of these politically conscious teachers and the inspiration of Gokhale, Gandhi<sup>44</sup> and other nationalist leaders that the students demonstrated twice against the European officers who visited the college with a view to suggesting certain measures to curb the growing anti-British feeling among the college students.<sup>45</sup>

To check the growing political consciousness and feelings of nationalism in the college, the Government of the Panjab reconstituted the college managing committee so as to ensure better official control over its affairs. By the new arrangement, the Commissioner of the Lahore Division became the ex-officio President and the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, the Director of Public Instructions, the Political Agent, Phulkian States and the European Principal became ex-officio members of the new managing committee. With all the members being nominated and removable by the Government, the college virtually passed into the hands of the Government. As a result some of the earlier members of the committee and the teachers with advanced political views were made to resign. This aroused the anger of the extremists among the Sikh leaders. Master Sunder Singh tried to arouse popular feelings by asserting that the college was no longer in the hands of the Sikhs. In an anti-British pamphlet entitled *Ki Khalsa Kalaj Sikhan da Hai ?* published in 1911,<sup>46</sup> he accused the British Government of 'having robbed the Sikhs of their college just as they had, by gross breach of faith, previously swallowed up the Panjab'. The pamphlet also denounced the pro-British Sikh leaders like Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia as 'traitors for their having brooked the official interference in the Khalsa College'.<sup>47</sup>

The socio-religious movements among the Sikhs exposed the evils which had slowly crept into the Sikh social and religi-



ous life and indirectly inculcated in them a desire for reform. The growing political unrest in the Panjab in the early twentieth century; the influence of the nationalist press and above all the growing forces of nationalism in the country further added to the growing unrest among the masses and prepared the ground for the coming Akali struggle directed against the Mahants and other vested interests in Sikh shrines on the one hand and against the British imperialism in Panjab on the other.

### **Growing Political Unrest in the Panjab**

The discontentment among the Panjabis with the British rule, which had been felt even before the occupation of the Panjab by the British in 1849, found its first organised expression in the form of the 'Agrarian Unrest' in 1907.<sup>48</sup> The trouble in the canal colonies, which was mainly agrarian in character, was the outcome of deeprooted economic and political causes,<sup>49</sup> and found an outlet in the form of protests against the Colonisation Bill which, apart from altering the earlier agreements made with the settlers about the ownership under the Act of 1893, also provided for higher rates of land revenue and irrigation.<sup>50</sup> Agrarian unrest of 1907 was perhaps the first instance in the Panjab in which the rural classes, especially the Jat Sikh peasantry in the canal colonies, gave expression to their discontent against the policies of the British Government. The nationalist press in the Panjab and outside supported their cause and demanded withdrawal of the Bill.<sup>51</sup> The occasion was also utilised by the nationalist leaders in the Panjab, like Lala Lajpat Rai, Ajit Singh and Syed Hyder Mirza to make the peasantry politically conscious. Banke Dayal's popular Panjabi verses '*Pagri Sambhal Oh Jatta, Pagri Sambhal Ohe* (oh peasant guard your turban) reminded the Panjabi peasantry of its miserable economic conditions and exploitation by the pro-British landed aristocracy and stirred them to action against the injustices of the British rule.<sup>52</sup>

The authorities in the Panjab took strong action against the agitators and their leaders, deporting Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh. But when the higher authorities in Delhi realised that the measure had caused uneasiness among the Sikh



soldiers, many of whom had families and relatives in the colonies, the Viceroy of India repealed the Colonisation Bill.<sup>53</sup>

Though vetoing of the Bill and the reduction in the land and water rates quietened popular agitation, the agrarian unrest exploded the myth of the loyalty of the Panjabis and marked the beginning of mass political awakening in the province.

### **The Ghadrite Propaganda**

The revolutionary Ghadr propaganda made major headway in the Panjab during the First World War. Panjabi emigrants to the USA were the largest component of the Ghadr movement. Sohan Singh Bhakna was the founding President of the association of 'Hindustani Workers of the Pacific Coast', which came to be popularly known as the Ghadr party because of its organisers' attempts to create Ghadr (rebellion) in India at the time of First World War.<sup>54</sup> During the War, the Ghadrites made serious efforts to develop contacts with Indian soldiers, particularly the Sikh regiments in the Panjab.<sup>55</sup> Some of the Ghadrite leaders set out for India in August 1914. They fixed 21 February 1915 as the date for a simultaneous rising in the military cantonments at Peshawar, Ferozepur, Ambala, Faizabad and elsewhere. But their plans leaked to the authorities who were able to take timely measures and thus foil their schemes.

Though the efforts of the Ghadrites to foster an uprising in India failed because of organisational weaknesses, lack of support from the masses and opposition from the pro-British landed leaders of the Sikhs in the Panjab and also the disapproval of the Ghadrites' programme by Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders,<sup>56</sup> they were nevertheless able to make a major contribution towards the articulation of discontentment against the British rule by inspiring many people by their patriotic and revolutionary propaganda.

Apart from instilling revulsion for the foreign rule, the Ghadrite activities also created a spirit of defiance of authority among the extremists in the Panjab which later found expression in the form of the Babbar Akali Jathas during the Akali struggle for Gurdwara reform.



**Post-War Discontent**

The demolition of the wall of Gurdwara Rakabganj, Delhi, the tragedy of Budge-Budge, the demobilisation of the Sikh soldiers after the War and the unsatisfactory treatment meted out to them during the War, further added to the discontent created by the Ghadrite propaganda. Apart from giving the Sikh soldiers a sense of confidence as a result of the repeated British propaganda about the 'superior martial qualities of the Sikhs' and 'their gallant deeds', their adventures abroad during the War also broadened their outlook. Many of them who fought in West Asia and Western Europe came into contact with the nationalist propaganda regarding the mal-treatment of Indians in Canada and the USA because of their race and colour. They also heard about the infamous conspiracy trials and the hangings and deportations of Sikhs and other Indians. Both during the War and later, on their return to India, they heard from their fellow villagers and relatives about the internment of nearly 5000 of their folk for alleged sympathy with the Ghadrites, of the enforcement of the Indent System, under which every village was forced to provide a certain number of recruits and of the coercions to raise funds for the War. After their demobilisation, most of the Sikh soldiers returned to their native villages only to add further to the growing woes of their people at home. Arbitrary cuts in the pensions of these soldiers, their disappointment at the non-fulfilment of various promises of rewards made to them for loyal services during the War, rendered these people utterly disillusioned and thus sowed the seeds of economic and political unrest in the province.

Several other factors contributed to the aggravation of political unrest. The summer monsoon failed; the *rabi* harvest was extremely poor; the cost of living rose higher than ever before. Also there was the imposition of the special tax on urban population. Last of all came the influenza epidemic.<sup>57</sup>

**Rowlatt Bills and Subsequent Agitation**

In the climate of depression and discontentment the Government added fuel to the fire by introducing the Rowlatt Bills in January, 1919.<sup>58</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, who had earlier been leading the agitation against the Bills, gave a call for complete



*hartal* to mark people's resentment and disapproval of the official measures. Hartal was observed in all the important towns of the Panjab on 30 March and again on 6 April 1919. In Amritsar, Doctors Kitchlew and Satyapal took a leading part in organising the hartal in which people belonging to different classes took part. This communal harmony in the Panjab combined with the fact of increasing uneasiness among the Sikhs, seems to have caused concern in official circles. As a result the two leaders were quietly whisked away to Dharamsala. As soon as the news of their deportation reached the people in the city, they assembled in a crowd and marched to the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow to register their protest. The police tried to stop the demonstrators on the way and in trying to disperse them killed half a dozen people and wounded thirty.<sup>59</sup> The action of the police infuriated the people who retaliated by attacking European officials and civilians and also official buildings in the city. In this riot five Englishmen were killed and an English lady missionary was assaulted. Disturbances occurred in other parts of the province—Lahore, Kasur, Jullundur and Multan being the important centres.<sup>60</sup>

### **Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy and its Impact**

This outburst of the popular unrest created panic among the British officials, who had so far banked on the myth of the 'loyalty of the Panjabis'. Two days after the happenings at Amritsar, Brigadier-General R.E.H. Dyer arrived at Amritsar with troops and armoured cars. The next afternoon, when he marched his troops through the main streets of the city to overawe the masses, he found the people reacting with '*Hindu Musalman ki Jai*' and '*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai*'.<sup>61</sup> The General proclaimed a state of emergency in the city and declared all meetings and assemblies illegal. The local Congress Committee, which had already announced a meeting at the Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April 1919, did not cancel the original programme in compliance of General Dyer's proclamation. In addition to the people who had gone to attend the Congress meeting a large number of Sikh villagers, who had gone to the Golden Temple to celebrate Baisakhi and were unaware of the proclamation, also reached Jallianwala Bagh.

As soon as the General received the news of the meeting



at Jallianwala Bagh he marched with a platoon of infantry, 'to prevent', in his own words, 'further rebellious acts . . .'.<sup>62</sup> He occupied the only entrance and exit to the Bagh and, without giving any warning to the people assembled there, opened fire, killing 379 and wounding over 2000 persons.<sup>63</sup>

While the country was busy in condemning this most brutal action and was engulfed in a wave of shock, horror and consternation, Arur Singh, the Government-appointed *Sarbrah* of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, invited the General to the temple and tried to whitewash his bloodstains by honouring him with a *saropa* and by declaring him a 'Sikh'.<sup>64</sup> The dialogue which took place between Arur Singh and other priests of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat on the one hand and General Dyer on the other, is worth quoting here :

'Sahib', they said, 'you must become a Sikh even as Nikalseyan Sahib became a Sikh'

The General thanked them for the honour, but he objected that he could not, as a British Officer, let his hair grow long.

Arur Singh laughed, 'We will let you off the long hair', he said.

General Dyer offered another objection, 'But I cannot give up smoking'.

'That you must do', said Arur Singh.

'No' said the General, 'I am very sorry, but I cannot give up smoking'.

The priest conceded, 'We will let you give it up gradually.'

'That I promise you', said the General, 'at the rate of one cigarette a year'.<sup>65</sup>

According to the biographer of General Dyer, the priests proceeded with the pseudo-initiation. 'General Dyer and Captain Briggs were invested with the five *Kakas*, the sacred emblems of that war-like brotherhood, and so became Sikhs.'<sup>66</sup>

While the tragedy of Jallianwala lent an impetus to the struggle for the country's freedom, the perfidious and sacrilegious action of Arur Singh brought home to the advocates of reform the urgency of putting a stop to the prevailing system of Gurdwara management, and with it the greed, licentiousness



and misdeeds of the Mahants, priests and other vested interests among them. Of the various factors contributing to the growing discontentment among the Sikh community, the fact of the gross misuse of their premier shrine at Amritsar at the hands of the Government-nominated *Saibrah* and the British officials in the Panjab seems to have proved the proverbial last straw on the camel's back and thus set the stage for the coming Akali struggle.



## STRUGGLE FOR REFORM IN THE SIKH SHRINES

### Some Early Phases of the Struggle

As a result of the combination of various factors discussed in the preceding chapter, the first decade of the twentieth century brought about a great religious and political awakening among the Sikhs and a passion for reform to a section of the Sikh community described in the official circles as the 'Neo-Sikhs' or the *Tat Khalsa*. Under the changed climate these reformers felt that they need no longer remain helpless spectators to the corrupt practices at their religious places. Initiative for reform was taken by the Sikh and pro-Sikh newspapers. As early as 1905, some of the newspapers like the *Khalsa Advocate*, the *Khalsa Samachar*, the *Khalsa Sewak* and *The Panjab* began complaining about the management of the Golden Temple, Amritsar and other important Sikh shrines.<sup>1</sup> These papers expressed grief and pain at the Gurdwaras and other trust holdings being converted into private properties of the Mahants and also other abuses in the prevailing system of management.<sup>2</sup> *The Panjab* reminded the Mahants that 'the Gurdwaras belong to the Sikh community and not the priests, who are mere servants of the panth'.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the Sikh press, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Singh Sabhas in different areas and the so-called natural leaders of the Sikhs, composed of the Sikh aristocracy and other title-holders, also made some attempts through their memorials to seek help from the Government in the purification of the Sikh shrines.<sup>4</sup> Various resolutions were passed by the Singh Sabhas condemning the 'base actions' of the Mahants and urging them



to improve their ways. But neither the Mahants nor the officials in the Panjab paid any attention to these resolutions and memorials which were couched in a humble tone.<sup>5</sup> Thus, when in the Sikh Educational Conference held at Jullundur on 10-12 April 1914, Sardar Harchand Singh, a militant reformer and political leader from Lyallpur, wanted a strong resolution to be passed protesting against the official action in demolishing the wall of Gurdwara Rakabganj,<sup>6</sup> Delhi, not only was his resolution disallowed but he was even compelled to leave the Conference along with Sardar Teja Singh Samundri and others following his way of thinking.<sup>7</sup> The Chief Khalsa Diwan tried to hush up the matter as it involved condemnation of the British Government. But on noticing that the volume of opposition was growing and their inaction was damaging their position, the Chief Khalsa Diwan leaders called a general-body meeting on 31 May 1914, in the Town Hall, Amritsar, and passed a mild resolution: 'That the Government be humbly requested to restore the land and enclosure of the wall of the garden to their original condition'.<sup>8</sup> But lest even this demand antagonise the Government, the resolution added, 'But if, for reasons of state, it is considered essential to change their form, then in the opinion of the Committee it will be acceptable...'<sup>9</sup> Similarly in the matter regarding the management of the Khalsa College, Sikh representation on the Councils and reform in the management of the Sikh shrines, they would not press their demands beyond the point where official displeasure began.<sup>10</sup>

Again in 1906 under pressure from the Singh Sabhas and the Sikh press, the Chief Khalsa Diwan passed a resolution asking the Government that the rules governing the management of the Golden Temple be so changed as to allow the Panth the right to appoint its manager and other officials. But nothing came even of this.<sup>11</sup>

Realising that mere passing of resolutions did not help the community, some Sikhs of advanced political opinions advocated the adoption of other methods. Boycotting of the temples, exerting greater public pressure on the Mahants and even litigation, were all tried in turn but to no success. Boycott could not prove effective as Mahants of most of the Gurdwaras, in which reforms were sought received an enormous in-



come from the tax-free jagirs attached to almost all the historic shrines yielding yearly income of lakhs of rupees.<sup>12</sup> Some of the Mahants earned a daily income of over Rs. 200 and were, therefore, able to withstand the stoppage of the offerings of devotees in case of boycott. The method of exerting greater public pressure on the Mahants proved an equal failure as they would readily promise to improve their ways when confronted with strong public pressure, but would revert to their old ways as soon as the pressure of public criticism subsided.<sup>13</sup> The reformers then thought of bringing about improvements in the Gurdwara management through litigation.

### **Reform through Litigation**

In the Charitable and Religious Endowment Act (Act XIV of 1920),<sup>14</sup> some rights were given to the beneficiaries in the control and management of temples. Therefore, the Sikh reformers, in the beginning, went to the courts of law in the hope to obtain popular control of their sacred places. Here too disappointment was in store for them. The courts could not help the reformers because the law, as it stood then, made it obligatory on the part of two or more beneficiaries of a temple to join hands to go to the Deputy Commissioner for permission to sue the Mahants guilty of misappropriation of funds. The Deputy Commissioner, being a supporter of the vested interests, used his discretion to deny the necessary permission in most of the cases. In other cases, where the reformers succeeded in obtaining the required permission, the cases could not be followed up for want of exorbitant court fees prescribed by the judicial machinery.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the law followed its own course, which was very slow. The reformers, full of passion for reform as they were, did not have the patience to wait indefinitely till the law could help them get possession of their temples. Even if the process were to be quickened, this could not have helped the Akali reformers as with the passage of time most of the Mahants had managed to get themselves registered as 'owners' of the trusts rather than their custodians. Though the Mahants were known to be the managers and custodians, and not the owners of the Gurdwaras, the concerned officials tacitly encouraged them to



seek the protection of the law which regarded them as 'owners'. Though outwardly the Government of the Panjab professed a policy of 'neutrality', perusal of the official records indicates that the local officials encouraged the Mahants to adopt a stiffer attitude towards the Akali reformers.<sup>16</sup> In some cases wherein the Sikh sangats of the areas succeeded in affecting a change in the management of some of the Gurdwaras through public pressure, the judicial machinery of the Government restored the *status quo* by way of civil notifications.<sup>17</sup>

Being convinced of the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the legal remedies for reform, the reformers now organised themselves in the form of local Akali Jathas.<sup>18</sup> Peaceful agitation was adopted as a weapon to fight the vested interests in the Sikh shrines on the one hand and the bureaucratic machinery in the Panjab on the other. This new weapon, as we shall soon discover, proved very effective and the Akali reformers were able to dislodge the Mahants and other vested interests in the Sikh shrines from their hereditary positions and the Government from its unreasonable stand in the course of a five-year (1920-25) struggle in the province.

To begin with, the agitation for reform was initiated by the local Akali Jathas in their respective areas but shortly two representative bodies of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Shiromani Akali Dal, came into existence with four objectives:

- (i) to bring the Sikh religious places under Panthic control and management,
- (ii) to do away with the permanent position of the Mahants, thus ending their irresponsibility,
- (iii) to utilise the property and income of the Gurdwaras for the purposes for which they were founded, and
- (iv) to practise the Sikh religion according to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus as preserved in the *Adi Granth*.<sup>19</sup>

In the course of their five-year struggle, these two bodies were not only able to obtain control over all the important Sikh shrines through peaceful agitation and passive sufferings, but also to strengthen the forces of nationalism in the Panjab by ejecting the Mahants, the Government-appointed managers



and other vested interests in the Sikh community. As a detailed narrative of the reform of over three hundred large and small Gurdwaras liberated by the Akalis is not possible in the present work, it has been limited only to the discussion of some of the most important Sikh shrines such as the Golden Temple and Akal Takhat at Amritsar, Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber at Sialkot, shrines at Nankana, Tarn Taran, Panja Sahib, Guru-ka-Bagh, and Jaito, etc.

Once the important Sikh shrines came under Akali control, the Mahants in charge of smaller Gurdwaras either voluntarily submitted to the authority of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee or were made to surrender their shrines and the jagirs attached to them under the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill passed in July 1925.

### **Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber**

Chronologically the first Gurdwara to be reformed through agitation was Babe-di-Ber, Sialkot.<sup>20</sup> When Harnam Singh, its Mahant, died, his widow had her minor son appointed as successor under the guardianship of one Ganda Singh, an Honorary Magistrate. There was a wave of resentment among the Sikhs throughout the Panjab against this action, and various Singh Sabhas sent telegrams to the Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab conveying their protest against this 'outrage'.<sup>21</sup> The Collector, however, decided to ignore all popular opposition and sanctioned the mutation in favour of the minor Mahant Gurcharan Singh. The reformers reacted by filing a civil suit in the court of the District Judge who ordered the plaintiffs to pay a court fee of Rs. 50,000 by 30 August 1920.<sup>22</sup> As the reformers could not collect such a huge amount, their plaint was rejected.

Having thus failed to achieve their object through recourse to the law courts, the reformers then resorted to agitation. The Sikhs of the locality organised themselves and formed a Khalsa Sewak Jatha to reform the Gurdwaras in the city. Under the new programme of action, they resumed holding weekly (and later daily) services in the Gurdwara. Ganda Singh placed many hurdles in the way of the reformers, but they succeeded in taking over the control of the shrine and re-starting the system of free *langar* which had been stopped by



the new Mahant.<sup>23</sup> On 5 October 1920, the Sikhs held a big Diwan and elected a permanent Committee of thirteen members for the control of the Gurdwara.<sup>24</sup> Some new developments in the affairs of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat, meanwhile, diverted the attention of the reformers and the arena of struggle shifted from a relatively small town to the Sikh headquarters at Amritsar.

### **The Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat**

Corrupt and non-Sikh practices in the precincts of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat at Amritsar<sup>25</sup> and official control over its management had been a source of great discontent among the Sikhs long before the beginning of the movement for reform. While the reformers were anxious to free these central seats of the Sikh religion from evil influences and from official control as early as possible, the British authorities in the Panjab resisted any effort at reform or change in the existing system of management which would deprive it of the privilege of using (rather misusing) the religious places of the Sikhs to consolidate their power and to weaken their political opponents.<sup>26</sup> History is full of such instances wherein the Government-appointed Sarbrahs of the Golden Temple were often used for glorifying the British rule and its functionaries. Moreover, with the weakening of the Sikh control over the management and the increasing hold of officialdom, the manager and the priests started taking their cue from the Deputy Commissioner and ignored Sikh opinion and sentiments in the day-to-day affairs of the temple. The Government-appointed Sarbrah, having kept the appointing authority appeased, spent his time in appropriating the huge wealth of the shrine, and consequently, neglected his daily religious duties. Costly gifts to the temple slowly found their way to the homes of the Sarbrah and other priests. The precincts began to be used by *Pundits* and astrologers; idols were openly worshipped in the Gurdwara premises. According to contemporary accounts, on *Basant* and *Hoti* festivals the whole place degenerated into a rendezvous for the local rogues, thieves and other bad characters. Pornographic literature was freely sold, and brothels were opened in the neighbouring houses where innocent women visiting the holy



temples were made victims of the lust of licentious *Sadhus*, Mahants and their friends.<sup>27</sup>

With the general awakening among them in the early decades of the twentieth century, the Sikhs began to resent these increasingly evil influences. Realising that any attempt at purification and improvement was not possible till the Gurdwaras were freed from official control, the reformers demanded that the *Dastur-ul-Amal* of the Golden temple be so changed as to allow the Sikh community unfettered say in its management.<sup>28</sup> The Sikh newspapers supported this demand with one voice. A meeting of the Sikh youth on 22 December 1906 passed a resolution asking the Government to hand over the control of the Durbar Sahib to the Chief Khalsa Diwan.<sup>29</sup> Similar resolutions were passed in other parts of the Panjab also.

The outbreak of the First World War temporarily lulled the stir for reform, but as soon as it ended the question of the control of Durbar Sahib was revived with even greater vigour. The newly formed Central Sikh League, at a meeting held at Amritsar in 1920, referred to the long-standing grievances of the Sikhs and demanded that 'this foremost seat of Sikh faith should be placed in the hands of a representative body of the Sikhs, constituted on an elective basis and responsible for its action to the Panth at large'.<sup>30</sup> Questions regarding the management of the Golden Temple were asked in the Panjab Legislative Council and the Government was requested to make the accounts public.<sup>31</sup> The Government tried to procrastinate and in a communique dated 14 July 1920, declared that 'the question has been deferred till the implementation of the Reform Scheme in the Panjab Legislative Council when the elected representatives of the Sikhs would be consulted on the issue'.<sup>32</sup>

But this communique failed to allay the growing discontent and unrest among the Sikhs. The reformers once again organised public meetings, passed resolutions against official inaction and demanded immediate resignation of the Government-appointed Sarbrah.<sup>33</sup> The Government then tried the use of force to check the rising unrest but failed and decided to pacify the agitators by sending the Sarbrah on two months' leave.<sup>34</sup> This, however, did not help abate the anger of the reformers who held a massive Diwan in the Jallianwala Bagh and threatened to take out a mock funeral of the effigy of the Sarbrah in case



he failed to resign by 29 August 1920.<sup>35</sup> This threat so frightened the Sarbrah that he appeared before the Diwan and with folded hands begged their forgiveness and announced that he had resigned.<sup>36</sup> This incident was described in the confidential reports of the Panjab Government as a 'decided victory for the party of reform'.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, certain fresh developments at the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat virtually brought these two shrines under the control of the reformers. As stated earlier, the priests at these temples did not like the action of the neo-Sikhs who were converting 'low-caste' persons and advocating their free integration into Sikh social life, including community-dining and intermarriages. The Khalsa Biradari of Amritsar led them in a procession to the Golden Temple. The Temple priests resisted their admission and refused to accept their offerings and prasad.<sup>38</sup> In the end, as the Holy Book was consulted, the controversy was settled in favour of the reformers. According to a contemporary:

the words (of the Holy Book) had a wonderful effect.....and the priests were convinced and agreed to offer prayer and accept sacred food from the hands of the newly converted Sikhs.<sup>39</sup>

But this compromise by the priests of the Golden Temple was not approved of by the priests of the Akal Takhat, who began to vacate their seats when the neo-Sikhs proceeded towards the Akal Takhat. The reform party took up the challenge and appointed their own volunteers to take temporary charge of the ceremonies. Soon a Provisional Committee consisting of nine members with Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, the new Sarbrah, as its head, was formed.<sup>40</sup>

This rapid march of events resulting in the strengthening of the Panthic control over the management of the Golden Temple along with the simultaneous increase in the Akali control over a large number of Gurudwaras seems to have unnerved the authorities in the Panjab. With a view to counteracting the reported move of the Akali leadership to form a central organisation of their own and control the management of the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras, the Government hasten-



ed the announcement of a Provisional Committee of 36 members for the management of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat and other nearby Gurdwaras. The Committee was formed in consultation with Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala. Though it included a few reformers, the majority of its members were from among the loyalists.

The Akali leadership, however, did not allow this strategy of the bureaucracy to succeed and went ahead with its original programme of forming a larger central organisation under the name of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.). Though the 36 members of the official committee were also included in the new organisation, the reformers constituted a majority in the S.G.P.C., for out of its 175 members only 40 were known to support the Government.<sup>41</sup> The outmanoeuvred bureaucracy had to wait for a year to implement its notions of official control over the Gurdwaras, when it took over the keys of the *Toshakhana* of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, in October 1921.

### **Panja Sahib and some other Gurdwaras**

During this period local units of Akalis had freed some other Gurdwaras from the control of their Mahants. It appears that the official action in publicly announcing its decision of 'divesting itself of the control of Durbar Sahib' and professing official 'sympathy for the cause of reform', greatly weakened the resistance of the Mahants of some smaller Gurdwaras to the local Jathas engaged in the work of reform. The Akali victory at Amritsar along with the formation of the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal meanwhile provided further encouragement to the local Jathas of reformers.

It was against this background that the struggle for the reform of Gurdwara Panja Sahib was renewed with increased vigour. A Jatha of 25 Akalis was despatched from Amritsar under the leadership of Bhai Kartar Singh Jhabbar. It reached Panja Sahib on 18 November 1920. The next day, when the Jatha was performing *Kirtan*, the new Mahant in a virulent speech declared that the Akalis had no concern with the temple and asked them to leave the premises immediately. The Akalis, on the other hand, insisted that the Jatha should be allowed to complete the *Kirtan*. While the Jatha



was still performing the Kirtan with four hymns still remaining, the Mahant's supporters stood up and began abusing Kartar Singh Jhabbar and other members of his Jatha and thus a clash ensued. When news of this confrontation reached the town, other sympathisers and supporters of the reformers flocked to the Gurdwara. The Akalis thought this to be an ideal opportunity to achieve their object. As a symbol of their having taken over the control of the Gurdwara, Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar took possession of the cash-box containing the daily offerings and declared the Mahant a *Tankhahia*, who was not to be allowed to enter the shrine till he went to the Akal Takhat 'to beg pardon for his acts'.<sup>42</sup> The Mahant's efforts to regain control of the Gurdwara failed. The Panja Sahib Gurdwara thus passed into the control of the reformers and a representative management committee was soon formed to look after it.

The Akali occupation of other Gurdwaras of lesser historical significance, including Chomala Sahib, Lahore, Tham Sahib in village Jhambr Kalan of Lahore District, Khara Sauda and Kar Sahib at Nankana, Chola Sahib in Ludhiana District, Gurdwara of Shekhupur and Khadur Sahib in Amritsar district, soon followed. Mahants of most of these shrines on their own swore allegiance to the S.G.P.C. and agreed to serve under it. Others were compelled to do so when the cases pending in the courts had been decided in favour of the Akalis.

### **Durbar Sahib, Tarn Taran**

The Akali reformers had their 'baptism of fire' during the incident at Durbar Sahib, Tarn Taran,<sup>43</sup> in early 1921. This shrine situated within fifteen kilometres of the city of Amritsar had been under the same management as that of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat. During the days of Arur Singh, Mahants of Tarn Taran became more or less independent and introduced many evil practices within the precincts of the Gurdwara.<sup>44</sup> After the sanctity of the Gurdwaras at Amritsar had been restored, those at Tarn Taran naturally attracted the attention of the Akali reformers. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, a local leader of the reform movement, is said to have invited the attention of the Mahants to the evils prevalent in the



system of management and respectfully asked them to improve their ways.<sup>45</sup> Sardar Lachhman Singh<sup>46</sup> is also said to have made a similar plea, but he and the girls of his school were not allowed to enter the Gurdwara to sing *Shabads*.<sup>47</sup> Similar treatment was meted out to other organisations desirous of reform. When a local Jatha advised the Mahants to arrange for the recitation of *Asa-di-Var* on 11 January 1921, the Mahants are said to have beaten up the members of the Jatha with *lathis*. It was widely believed that the Mahants' truculent attitude towards reformers was abetted by the assurance of help given to them by Mr. C M. King, the Commissioner of Lahore Division.

The accounts of growing immoral practices at Tarn Taran and the arrogant and indecent behaviour of the Mahants towards visitors began to reach daily the Akali headquarters at Amritsar. One such story narrated by a woman visitor on 24 January 1921, before a general meeting of the Sikhs at Akal Takhat, is said to have created a great sensation, arousing the assembled Akalis to immediately march towards Tarn Taran in order to purify the place. The next morning, about 40 Akalis under the leadership of Bhai Teja Singh Bhhuchar reached there. The priests, whose number is estimated to be 70, tried to provoke the Akalis but a clash was avoided through a compromise. The priests agreed to the formation of a Joint Committee to settle the dispute which was a trick to gain time to prepare themselves for an attack. They even announced at night their decision to accept the proposals and asked the Akalis to bring a fair copy of the document to be signed by them. While the Akalis were waiting for the document to be signed, the priests, instead of returning the document, mounted an attack. It was around 9.00 p.m. that the dead-drunk priests pounced upon the peaceful and unsuspecting Akalis. Some members of the Jatha who were inside the Gurdwara were seriously wounded. The priests used lathis, daggers and brick-bats. The holy place was soon smeared with the blood of the wounded Akali volunteers, two of whom succumbed to their injuries.<sup>48</sup> On receiving this news, the District Magistrate, the Superintendent of Police, and other officials rushed to the place to meet the leaders of both the parties. On finding that the Akalis were not to be blamed, they expressed their sympathies



for them. By an official order, the priests were barred from entering the Gurdwara until the matter was finally decided by the Prabandhak Committee. The Gurdwara having thus come into hands of the reformers, a Provisional Committee of management was formed, pending the appointment of a regular committee by the S.G P.C.<sup>49</sup>

During the struggle for the reform of Tarn Taran the Akalis had to shed their blood for the first time. But the incident at Tarn Taran heralded, as it were, a greater tragedy soon after at Nankana. It appears that the Government began tacitly to encourage the Mahants and the priests to resist the Akali pressure for changes in the management of the Gurdwaras. While, in the beginning, the Government had remained aloof, the Mahants of some smaller Gurdwaras had yielded to the ever increasing public pressure for reform. But the letter<sup>50</sup> which Mr. C.M. King wrote to Baba Kartar Singh Bedi—informing the Mahants that the Akalis ejecting them from their shrines ‘were liable to punishment’ and that they (the Mahants) ‘could go to the courts of law and demand recovery of rights’—along with other official assurances of support given to the Mahants incited them to violently resist the efforts of the reformers. The priests could not have offered violent opposition to the peaceful Akali reformers if they had not been sure of the connivance, and even support, of the officialdom. After the reported meeting of these priests with Mr. King at Lahore and the assurance of help (which he is said to have given them), Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, a local leader, wrote to him about the danger which the rumoured assurances posed to the Akalis and requested him to publicly contradict these rumours if there was no substance in them.<sup>51</sup> The failure of Mr. King to do so points to the official complicity in the matter. The trial of the Akali leaders involved in the Tarn Taran incident about a year later, and the sentences passed on them, only tended to confirm the official involvement. Along with the priests who had committed gruesome murders, the Akali reformers were also sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.<sup>52</sup> The Akalis had, of course, following the policy of non-cooperation refused to offer any legal defence in the courts.

Arbitrary sentences passed on the Akalis by the courts made the Akali leadership believe that the bureaucracy was



backing the Mahants. The tragedy of Nankana confirmed the Akali belief about the official complicity in the matter of the Mahant's preparations and the official opposition to the reform movement. They realised that they could not fight against the Mahants effectively till the Government, which backed the vested interests, was compelled to withdraw its support. Hence, the Akali leadership widened the scope of its earlier programme of Gurdwara reform and launched a two-pronged religio-political struggle in the Panjab, directed against the Mahants and other priests on the one hand and against the Government of the province on the other. The tragedy of Nankana was thus a turning point both in the annals of the Akali struggle in the Panjab and in the official policy towards it.

### **The Nankana Tragedy and its Aftermath**

Nankana, being the birth place of Guru Nanak, occupies the most important position among the Sikh places of religious worship. Apart from the Gurdwara of Janam Asthan, where the Guru was born, there are over half a dozen other shrines connected with different events of the early life of the Guru.<sup>53</sup> During the early decades of the twentieth century the Gurdwara of Janam Asthan came to be controlled by Mahant Sadhu Ram, who was leading irreligious and licentious life.<sup>54</sup> Mahant Narain Das, who succeeded to the Mahantship after the death of Sadhu Ram, followed his predecessor's patterns of life.<sup>55</sup>

The Sikhs of the area tried to curb the evil practices but to no effect, since the Mahants had the backing of the local British officials. These officials, being themselves party to the excesses in the Gurdwara, were not interested in improvements.<sup>56</sup> The Mahants spent lakhs of rupees out of the Gurdwara funds in offering rich presents to the local revenue and other officials on whose goodwill and support depended their appointment and continuance in office.<sup>57</sup> In return, these officials assured them official help in cases of emergency.<sup>58</sup> It was in this milieu that Narain Das came to occupy the *gaddi* of the Mahant in Nankana. With a view to warding off the danger of opposition from the Sikh reformers, he is said to have promised the Sikh congregation that the conduct of the old Mahant had gone with



him on his funeral pyre and that he would never tread in his predecessor's footsteps. But subsequent events indicated the shallowness of his promises and he was not able to resist evil influences. Moreover, a proper administration of Gurdwara funds and a friendly relationship with the reformers could alienate the sympathy of his official well-wishers and patrons. Soon after his appointment as the Mahant of Janam Asthan, he began to drift towards an immoral life. With the passage of time, he started practising the usual vices. He is said to have kept a Muhammadan drummer's wife, invited dancing girls to Nankana Sahib and permitted profane singing even in the sacred precincts of Janam Asthan. This behaviour was widely condemned and resolutions were passed by various Singh Sabhas expressing indignation at the sacrilege and urging the Government to take steps to prevent such action in the future. But these resolutions failed to deter the Mahant. All profane practices in the Gurdwara continued.<sup>59</sup>

The state of affairs in Nankana Sahib attracted the attention of the Akali reformers. To begin with, they adopted the usual method of holding Diwans to discuss the deplorable conditions at Janam Asthan and other Gurdwaras at Nankana and called upon the Mahants to reform. One such Diwan was held at Dharowal early in October 1920.<sup>60</sup> A resolution was passed calling upon Mahant Narain Das to improve his ways and cleanse the administration of the temple. This resolution as well as the news that the Golden Temple, Akal Takhat and other Gurdwaras at Amritsar had passed into the hands of the Akali reformers made the Mahant realise the impending danger. But instead of reforming or even arriving at a compromise with the Akalis, Narain Das began to recruit a strong force to resist the Akali Movement. He is also said to have had a personal interview with Mr. C M. King, the Commissioner of Lahore Division, who gave him a verbal assurance of help in the event of an Akali attack on his shrine.<sup>61</sup> In consultation with Baba Kartar Singh Bedi and other Mahants, Narain Das arranged a meeting at Nankana which was attended by over sixty Mahants. It was decided at the meeting not to recognise the authority of the newly formed S.G P.C. and a parallel committee was formed with Mahant Narain Das as its President and Mahant Basant Das as the Secretary. A newspaper (*Sant Sewak*) was



also started from Lahore to carry on propaganda against the Akali Movement.<sup>62</sup>

After thus organising the Mahants against the Akali reformers, Narain Das started making regular large-scale preparations for what is described in official correspondence as 'self-defence', but was in reality a deep-laid plan to crush the Akali reformers. Fortnightly reports from district level officials to the Panjab Government and higher authorities in Delhi and London, clearly indicate vigorous preparation by the Mahant and the possibility of a trial of strength between the Mahant's men and the Akali reformers. About three months before the tragedy of Nankana, the fortnightly report for the second half of November 1920, while making a reference to the possible 'assault' on the Nankana shrine by the extremists pointed out that the clash was averted because 'the Mahants were prepared.'<sup>63</sup> The personal explanation of Mr. C.M. King before the Panjab Legislative Council and the statements of approvers and the witnesses in the '*Nankana Sahib Case*' confirm Mahant Narain Das's large-scale preparation to meet the Akali challenge.<sup>64</sup> Even the Home Member of the Panjab Government, Sir John Maynard, admitted that 'the information in possession of the Panjab Government indicated an intention on the part of the Mahant to prevent the shrine and its enclosures from being rushed by an attacking party...'<sup>65</sup>

Thus, on the pretext of 'self-defence' and 'fortification of the shrine from being rushed by the Akalis', Mahant Narain Das collected about 400 mercenaries, including notorious outlaws like Ranjha and Rehana and armed them with swords, lathis, *chhavis*, *takwas* and other lethal weapons. Arms and ammunition and kerosene were kept in ready stock. According to one of the Mahant's servants, a large number of pistol cartridges were also bought by him from a dealer in Lahore.<sup>66</sup> A further reinforcement of 100 Pathans under the leadership of Ismail Bhatti was also kept ready to strike at a moment's notice.

That the local authorities had full knowledge of the above preparations by the Mahant and had informed the higher echelons is clearly indicated in the fortnightly reports sent to the Government. The Report for the second half of November 1920—about three months before the tragedy—pointed to the



possible assault on the Nankana Shrine and mentioned that the 'Mahants were prepared'. The personal explanation which C.M. King gave in the Panjab Legislative Council also confirms this. In the course of his explanation he stated, '...similarly it has been rumoured that the Mahant was secretly collecting weapons with which to defend himself from the attack planned on him'.<sup>67</sup> Again, during his visit to Nankana he saw the Mahant's preparations with his own eyes and noticed that a big iron gate with spy-holes had been installed. Instead of asking the Mahant for an explanation for these large-scale preparations or making adequate police arrangements to deal with the situation, he justified this action of the Mahant by declaring that 'these preparations seemed evidently to be intended for defence against the attack from outside'.<sup>68</sup>

In spite of these instances of the Mahant's preparations and the local officials and residents informing the Deputy Commissioner about his designs, the authorities failed to make any police arrangements or to dissuade the Mahant from coming into armed conflict with the Akali reformers. On the other hand, when the Mahant approached the authorities and asked them for police protection he was told 'to make his own arrangements'.<sup>69</sup> The Mahant was also given a copy of the letter which Mr. C.M. King had earlier written to Baba Kartar Singh Bedi in December 1920. In the letter Mr. King had written, '...that any person who attempts to eject forcibly any Mahant...is liable to punishment under the criminal law ...' In the letter Mr. King also advised the Mahants 'to sue the Akalis for recovery in cases where they had been ejected...'.<sup>70</sup> Mr King is also said to have addressed a letter to Messrs Walter Locke and Company of Lahore to supply any amount of arms and ammunition required by Mahant Narain Das.<sup>71</sup> It was Mr. King's verbal and written assurances of help that emboldened Narain Das and other Mahants to resist the Akali reformers. Official backing stiffened Mahant Narain Das's attitude *vis-a-vis* the Akali reformers.

In the meantime, the S.G.P.C. was also considering ways and means to bring this important Gurdwara under Panthic control. The preparations of the Mahant were repeatedly discussed by the native press in the Panjab. As the Akali leadership did not want to depart from the policy of non-violence agreed



upon earlier, they discouraged the extremist Jathas from attempting forcible occupation of Nankana which could lead to violence and bloodshed. On the other hand, in a meeting held on 24 January 1921, a resolution was passed by the S.G.P.C. calling upon the whole Panth to assemble in a Diwan at Nankana from 4 to 6 March 1921, and to impress upon the Mahant the need for reform. On 6 February another meeting of the S.G.P.C. was called in which a five-member committee was appointed to make langar arrangements for the proposed Diwan.<sup>72</sup>

The reported decision of the S.G.P.C. and the prospect of a big Diwan of the Akalis in early March seem to have frightened the Mahant. Meanwhile he might also have heard the rumours about Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar's plans of a forcible seizure of the Gurdwara in case the Mahant failed to mend his ways. As such he showed some signs of compromise and in a meeting with Kartar Singh Jhabbar agreed to the appointment of a committee of management on certain conditions.<sup>73</sup>

The Mahant's proposal for a dialogue was discussed by the Akali leaders and a five-member committee was formed to negotiate with him. The Mahant was invited to attend an Akali meeting at Sacha Sauda, Sultanpur, to be held from 7 to 9 February 1921, but he failed to attend. Another meeting was fixed on 14 February at Sheikhpura, but once again he abstained and asked for a meeting at Lahore, which was agreed to by the Akalis. However, before the meeting could take place, the Mahant seems to have changed his mind, presumably on the advice of his supporters. Instead of meeting the Akali leaders he started making further preparations for a confrontation by reinforcing the existing force of 400 mercenaries by engaging 28 more Pathans. A detailed strategy seems to have been evolved and discussed with other Mahants at a secret meeting. According to Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar, the Mahant formed a plan for the murder of top Akali leaders and to this end he agreed to give a lakh and a half of rupees to the hooligans of Manjaha, who were to take twelve assassins to Nankana on 6 March.<sup>74</sup> It seems that through repeated postponing of the dates of a meeting with the Akali leadership, the Mahant was gaining time to mount further preparations for a violent confrontation.



The murderous plans of the Mahant seem to have been known to the Akali leadership who made desperate efforts to dissuade the Jathas from going to Nankana before the planned general assembly on 4 March 1921, and thus falling into the trap laid by the Mahant. It was with this object that Sardar Harchand Singh, Teja Singh Samundri and Master Tara Singh were sent to Nankana to stop the Jathas from proceeding to Gurdwara Janam Asthan. These leaders reached Nankana on 19 February 1921, and were joined by Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Master Sunder Singh, Jaswant Singh Jhabal and Dalip Singh. There they all decided to enforce the earlier decision of the Akali leadership not to send the Jathas to Nankana before the fixed date. Dalip Singh and Jaswant Singh were sent to Khara Sauda to meet Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar and to persuade him to abandon his plan for the forcible occupation of Nankana. After having informed Jathedar Jhabbar, Dalip Singh proceeded to Sunderkot to inform Bhai Lachhman Singh not to start for Nankana as planned. On finding that Bhai Lachhman Singh and his Jatha had already left the place, Dalip Singh then proceeded to the factory of Ehai Uttam Singh which was located about a mile away from Nankana.<sup>75</sup>

Bhai Lachhman Singh had started for Nankana late in the evening of 19 February 1921 with a few companions. On the way more people joined him. On the morning of 20 February, the party reached a place half a mile away from Gurdwara Janam Asthan. Here they met a messenger of Bhai Dalip Singh and received a message containing the S.G.P.C.'s instructions not to proceed to Janam Asthan. Bhai Lachhman Singh agreed, but the other members of his Jatha persuaded him that there would be no harm if they visited the Gurdwara and, after paying their homage, returned peacefully. Having been thus persuaded by his companions, Bhai Lachhman Singh proceeded to the Janam Asthan and arrived there at the head of his Jatha at about six in the morning.<sup>76</sup> He and his Jatha thus fell into the trap cleverly laid by Mahant Narain Das.

The arrival of such a large Jatha seems to have led the supporters of the Mahant to believe that the Akalis had come to forcibly occupy the Gurdwara of Janam Asthan in accordance with the earlier plan prepared by Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar. This news was conveyed to the Mahant who had



boarded a train for Lahore to attend a meeting of the Mahants there. He thence gave up the planned journey, returned to Janam Asthan and alerted his men.<sup>77</sup>

The Mahant seems to have acted according to a carefully worked out plan. This is borne out by the fact that a few days earlier he had shifted his family and valuables to Lahore. According to an eyewitness account, on hearing the news of the arrival of the Jatha the Mahant distributed arms and ammunition to his men and exhorted them to action saying, 'Sikhs are coming, get ready'.<sup>78</sup> As soon as the Jatha entered the main gate of the Gurdwara, the Pathans posted outside, shut the gate at a signal from the Mahant.<sup>79</sup> The members of the Jatha, who were unaware of these designs, sat down after bowing before the holy *Granth* and started singing hymns. According to the statement of Mr. H.A. Herbert, the Public Prosecutor in the Nankana Case, 'Firing started almost as soon as the Akalis entered the Gurdwara. Not a single syllable was addressed to them; they were fired upon without parley or question ...'<sup>80</sup> Immediately 25 of the Mahant's men went atop the roof of the verandah and started firing at the Akalis sitting below. The rest of the Mahant's men and Sadhas began throwing bricks at the Sikhs, some of whom ran to take shelter in the side-rooms.<sup>81</sup> Others who ran to the side of the sanctuary were shot dead there. About 25 members of the Jatha who remained inside the Gurdwara calmly suffered martyrdom. About 60 of the Akalis shut themselves in another sancturay called *Chaukhandi* but the Mahant's men broke open the doors and killed them there. Then the side-rooms were searched and 25 Akalis found there were put to death. According to contemporary accounts, Mahant Narain Das was himself supervising the whole show and urging his men 'to spare no long-haired Sikh in the whole vicinity'.<sup>82</sup>

After wounding and killing all the members of Bhai Lachhman Singh's party and other Jathas along with their sympathisers, the Mahant and his men collected and burnt most of the dead and wounded by pouring kerosene which had already been stored for the purpose. According to an eyewitness account, 'In these burnt heaps there were traces of arms, heads, legs and other parts of bodies chopped off into small bits and practically the whole compound was full of blood'.<sup>83</sup> The



Public Prosecutor also confirms the fact that 'the Mahant tried to obliterate all traces of the killed by burning the corpses'.<sup>84</sup> Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India, in his report to the Secretary of State for India, also refers to the Mahant's attempt to burn all the dead bodies.<sup>85</sup>

On coming to know of the tragedy, Bhai Uttam Singh, a local factory owner, and Sardar Karam Singh, the Station Master, tried to inform the higher authorities in the Panjab as well as the Akali and the national leaders. Urgent telegrams were sent to the Lt. Governor of the Punjab, the Deputy Commissioner of Sheikhupura, the Superintendent of Police, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and to Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>86</sup> Though Mr. Currie, the Deputy Commissioner, arrived at about 12.30 p.m. he could do nothing without the assistance of the police. Curiously enough, although there were clear indications of a possible clash between the Mahant's men and the Akali reformers, the lone Sub-Inspector at the nearby police station of Warburton was on leave on the day of the tragedy. He and another Sub-Inspector from Mangatwala arrived at the scene of the tragedy only after the Deputy Commissioner had arrived.<sup>87</sup> According to the reports published in the native press, even after the arrival of the Deputy Commissioner the burning of the dead and the wounded continued for about an hour and a half.<sup>88</sup> By late evening, Mr. C.M. King, Commissioner of Lahore Division, and the D.I.G of Police, Central Range, also reached Nankana along with 100 British and 100 Indian troops. Mahant Narain Das, with two of his henchmen and 26 Pathans, was arrested and sent to Lahore, but a large number of hooligans succeeded in escaping. The Gurdwara Janam Asthan was placed under military guard.<sup>89</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar and his Jatha had planned forcible occupation of the Gurdwara. But the idea had to be abandoned because of its disapproval by the Akali leadership. The cold-blooded murder of the Sikhs at Nankana greatly enraged the Akali Jathas of Lyallpur and Sheikhupura districts. The news that the Gurdwara Janam Asthan had been taken over by the army further inflamed their tempers. Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar along with his Akali Jatha was stationed at Khara Sauda when he heard of the tragedy. Through his initiative a strong force of about 2,200 Akalis was soon ready



to march to Nankana and take possession of the Gurdwara. Marching at the head of his Jatha, Jhabbar was stopped on the way near village Khipwala on 21 February 1921 and served with an order from the Deputy Commissioner forbidding the Akalis to proceed towards Janam Asthan. According to the biography of the Jathedar, he tore this order into pieces in front of the very eyes of the messenger and told him to inform the Deputy Commissioner, 'I am coming with my Jatha, you may do whatever you please.' Jhabbar and his Jathas continued their march towards Janam Asthan when they were next stopped by the Deputy Commissioner himself, who, according to the biographical account, warned the members of the Jatha that 'if they proceed further, they will face bullets' <sup>90</sup> But ignoring the warning, the Jathedar ordered his followers to march on till they reached Janam Asthan and took control of the Gurdwara. At this development the Deputy Commissioner seems to have yielded, and, after consulting the Commissioner, he agreed to hand over the keys of the Janam Asthan to Jhabbar provided the Akalis agreed to the formation of a committee of management for the Gurdwara. After some discussions, the charge of the Gurdwara was handed over to a committee consisting of seven members under the Presidentship of Sardar Harbans Singh Attari, a moderate Chief Khalsa Diwan leader <sup>91</sup> After the arrest of Mahant Narain Das and the passing over of Janam Asthan to the control of a committee of management, Mahants of more than half a dozen other local Gurdwaras felt utterly demoralised. They did not offer any resistance to the Akali reformers and voluntarily surrendered their shrines to the S.G.P.C.

The most important aspect of the Nankana tragedy, i.e., its nature, official attitude and the Akali involvement in the affair warrant further detailed discussion. Next to the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, the tragedy of Nankana evoked the greatest public criticism in the press and amongst the public. Apart from condemning the Mahant and his henchmen, suspicions began to be openly expressed about involvement of local officials in the tragedy.

The tragedy greatly perturbed the Sikhs in different parts of the country who vehemently condemned the action of the Mahant and sent messages of sympathy for the Akali martyrs.



Resolutions were passed everywhere demanding the death penalty for the Mahant and his associates.<sup>92</sup> The native press was unanimous in its attack on the Mahant. Even papers opposed to the Akali leadership condemned 'the cruel and savage deed of the Nankana Mahant' and sympathised with the families of the Nankana martyrs.<sup>93</sup> National leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Dr. Kitchlew, Lala Duni Chand and Lala Lajpat Rai, visited the scene of the tragedy and expressed sympathy for the Akalis. Prominent Sikh leaders, Members of the Punjab Legislative Council, the Sikh League, the Chief Khalsa Diwan and other Sikh organisations reached the spot.<sup>94</sup> In a big Shahidi Diwan held at Nankana on 3 March 1921, Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar, who had played a prominent role in taking over the keys of the Janam Asthan from the Deputy Commissioner, narrated the incident in brief and pointed out that 'the happening had awakened the Sikhs from their slumber and the march towards Swaraj had been quickened'.<sup>95</sup> Maulana Shaukat Ali, after making a reference to the days of the martial law and the horrors perpetrated by the Government, pointed out 'how futile it was to expect justice from such a Government'.<sup>96</sup> In the course of his speech he also held the Government responsible for the mischief and rebuked the Pathans for having helped the Mahant in this crime.

Mahatma Gandhi visited Nankana on 3 March to express his sympathy for the Akali Sikhs. In a Shahidi Diwan arranged on the same day, the Mahatma made a brief speech in Hindustani in the course of which he said that 'the news of Nankana was so staggering that they would not believe it without confirmation'.<sup>97</sup> Condemning the cruel deed of the Mahant and commending the Akalis for their passive sufferings, he described the martyrdom of the Akali reformers as an 'act of national bravery'. He also denounced the foreign Government whose rule, he said, 'was based on devilish tricks'.<sup>98</sup> Later, in a message to the Sikhs in Lahore, while comparing the tragedy of Nankana to a similar one in April 1919 at the Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, the Mahatma said, 'Everything I saw and heard points to a second edition of Dyerism, more barbarous, more calculated and more fiendish than the Dyerism of Jallianwala'.<sup>99</sup> The Mahatma also advised the Akalis to offer non-cooperation in the matter of official enquiry in the



Nankana tragedy and consented to serve as Chairman of the non-official Commission of Enquiry set up by the Sikh League, provided the Sikhs adopted a formal resolution affirming non-cooperation and agreed not to take recourse to the British law-courts for getting the murderers punished.<sup>100</sup>

Now that the facts and figures of the Nankana affairs are available to researchers, it has become easier to expose the double-standards that the bureaucracy adopted in this matter. On the one hand the Mahant of Nankana was being secretly helped and encouraged to prepare for what the officials described as 'self-defence' and on the other, sympathy was being expressed for the objects of the movement of Gurdwara reform. It was this policy of the Panjab Government that was chiefly responsible for the unfortunate happening at Nankana. On going through the contents of Mr. C.M. King's letter to Baba Kartar Singh Bedi,<sup>101</sup> his Personal Explanation to the Panjab Legislative Council, various intelligence reports and the lengthy correspondence between the Governments of the Panjab and India on the one hand and the Viceroy and the Secretary of State on the other, one is led to believe that the massacre of the Akalis at Nankana was a well-planned and premeditated conspiracy and the Government officials were not only in the know of it but were actively backing the Mahant. In the course of his Personal Explanation in the Council, Mr. King said, 'It is true to say that some months before the occurrence of the 20th February—ever since the beginning of October in fact—the air has been full of vague rumours of attack on the Nankana on the 4th, 5th and 6th March...'<sup>102</sup> He also admitted that Mr. Currie and other officials under him had been passing the correct information on the subject to him. Moreover, weekly and fortnightly reports which were sent by the local officials to the higher authorities also point to the growing tension at Nankana and elsewhere in the Panjab. One of the reports describes the situation in the province during the week ending 15 February 1921, just six days before the tragedy, as :

The Akali Dal Movement to obtain possession of all Sikh Gurdwaras is gaining force and several Gurdwaras have been taken over by the new party. The visit of an Akali



Dal to Tarn Taran on the 26th January resulted in a serious riot between the Akalis and the Pujaris...several persons on both sides were wounded. . . .<sup>103</sup>

An earlier report about Nankana fair in November 1920, ran as follows:

A great assault by the extremists on the Nankana shrine was expected on the occasion of the annual fair, but the Mahants were prepared and everything passed off quietly. . . .<sup>104</sup>

Information given in the second report is also confirmed by Mr. King himself when, in his attempt to justify the actions of Mr. Currie, he said that at a big fair at the end of November 1920, Currie's presence and exertions averted what might have been even a worse tragedy than what actually happened on 20 February 1921. If the Mahant was prepared to cause a 'worse tragedy' earlier in November 1920, there were all the more reasons to expect a bigger clash in February 1921, when the climate was charged with tension and the Mahant had further strengthened his preparations. But the authorities failed to heed the warning from the mounting tension at Nankana and the bloodshed at Tarn Taran on 26 January 1921. There is further evidence to show that at least two private citizens also informed Mr. King about the Mahant's preparations.

The veracity of the 'vague rumours', as Mr. King described numerous reports of the large-scale preparation of Mahant Narain Das, was confirmed when he paid a personal visit to Nankana towards the end of January 1921. Though he saw these preparations and even fortifications, he attempted to justify these by suggesting that they were intended for defence against attack from outside. This justification of the Mahant's actions by the custodian of law and order of an important Division of the Panjab and his statement that 'all fair-minded persons would admit that they were perfectly legitimate' can only be taken to mean that illegal large-scale possession of pistols, rifles, cartridges, etc., was also within the arbit of law, and so, perhaps, was the manufacture, in the Gurdwara compound, of swords, daggers, *chhavis*, and other lethal weapons.



That Mr. King and his subordinates not only knew about the Mahant's preparations but also encouraged him to make them is borne out by the statement which Mahant Narain Das made before the court. 'I was told by the Commissioner and other responsible Government officials that this was a religious matter and *I was told to make my own arrangements*'.<sup>105</sup> This belief is further confirmed by the letter of Mr. King stating that 'any person who attempts to eject forcibly any Mahant or any other person holding rights in a shrine is liable to punishment under Criminal Law',<sup>106</sup> and further advised that where 'in spite of precautions or without precaution he is ejected from the shrine he can sue for recovery of his rights and also bring criminal proceedings'.<sup>107</sup> Justifying the issuing of this letter he said, 'The letter which I issued was written in the hope that Jathas would recognize that they were acting contrary to law and would restrain themselves'.<sup>108</sup> The letter was not intended, as Mr. King suggested, merely to warn the Jathas that they were acting contrary to the law but, in fact, served as a great source of encouragement and moral support to the Mahants of Nankana and other places. The letter did not merely inform the Mahants of the legal remedies, but also indirectly advised them to resist the movement of reform and brought home to them the fact that the law or, at any rate Mr. King, was on their side. Had Mr. King not addressed this letter to the Mahants and justified Narain Das's preparations, perhaps, the latter would have compromised with the Akali leadership and agreed to serve under the S.G.P.C. as the Mahant of other smaller shrines had done.

Equally responsible was Mr. King for his failure to make adequate police arrangements at Nankana. Though he admitted that after his visit to Nankana he 'felt the risk of a collision was increasing' and knew that a big Diwan was to take place on 4-6 March, he did not arrange for the establishment of a police post or to ensure sufficient reserves to be rushed to Nankana in case of emergency. On the other hand, when the Mahant demanded police protection in December 1920, he was refused the same on the ground that the Government did not wish to interfere in religious affairs and was told to 'make his own arrangements'.<sup>109</sup> Again, when in January 1921, the Mahant sent a telegram to the Deputy Superintendent of Police



of Gujranwala informing the authorities of the Akalis' forcible possession of Darbar Sahib and requesting immediate help, the authorities did not take any action in the matter. While delivering his judgement in the *Akali v. C.M. King Defamation Case*, the judge clearly fixed the responsibility on Mr. King when he observed, 'The plea that the police was not available is ridiculous. No Government could be worthy of the trust which could not help keep an eye on the doings of its people.'<sup>110</sup>

It appears that the British officials in the Panjab were playing a double game. On the one hand they did not wish to lose the goodwill of the Sikh community and therefore, followed a policy of 'non-interference in the religious affairs of the Sikhs' and on the other, they did not want to withdraw themselves from the direct or indirect control of the Gurdwaras. Under the circumstances, the policy of local officials, *i.e.*, secretly encouraging the Mahants to offer tough resistance to the Akalis and outwardly professing 'sympathy' with the movement of reform, promised best results. It appears from the above facts about the tragedy that the officials wanted the growing movement of the Akalis to be crushed through the Mahants and thus to save themselves from incurring the displeasure of the Sikh community. Hence, the lower-level officials not only allowed the Mahant to prepare himself to meet the growing movement but secretly encouraged and patronised him wishing him success in his mission.

But this policy of the Government and the failure of the local officials to take precautionary measures to avert the tragedy became a subject of severe criticism both in the Executive Council of the Viceroy of India and in the office of the Secretary of State for India in London. In a letter addressed to Lord Reading, the then Viceroy, Mr. E.S. Montague, Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, criticised the official action with regard to the Sikh situation and observed that 'the Government action comes after the trouble and not in anticipation of it...'<sup>111</sup> The Viceroy, during his perusal of the Mahant's appeal, remarked, 'I am concerned to note the written statement of the Mahant, which, if accepted, indicates that he only resorted to the incitement of violence after making representations and appeals to the local authorities for protection...'



He further observed that 'the inference to be drawn, namely, that had police protection been given this whole-sale massacre would not have taken place'.<sup>112</sup> The Panjab Government did its best to justify the inaction of the local officials on the plea that this was done 'with a view to avoiding any semblance of partiality towards one or the other of the two religious groups and more especially with a view to avoiding action that might drive the Sikhs generally, who had as a body, behaved most loyally during the War, into anything like opposition to the Government'.<sup>113</sup> But this and other arguments did not convince the Viceroy and other members of his council. In a letter dated 6 June 1922, S P. O'Donnell expressed the dissatisfaction of the Government of India with the policy of the local Government, 'The explanation offered, however, of the action or rather inaction of the Panjab Government is entirely unconvincing.'<sup>114</sup> Other members of the Council equally condemned the policy of the Panjab Government and the inaction of its district level officials. In a note dated 17 June 1922, L. Graham observed, 'The District Magistrate and his superior officers appear to have overlooked the primary duty of the executive to maintain the peace. . .' He further remarked, 'The tragedy would have been averted if the Panjab Government had, in consequence of the information received by it, taken proper steps for the preservation of peace. . .'<sup>115</sup>

But the most interesting part of the whole story is that in spite of this strong criticism of the action of the local officials and their responsibility for the tragedy of Nankana having been established, neither did the Viceroy of India nor any other member of his Executive Council ask the Government of the Panjab to take any action against the concerned officials. On the other hand, noticing that the reluctance on the part of the Government to clarify the position of its lower officials was causing controversy and disgracing the bureaucracy, the Council members suggested to the authorities in the Panjab that prior to the institution of legal proceedings against the Mahant and his men, the concerned British officials should be exonerated. It was also suggested that repeated statements should be issued that these officials were not guilty of neglect of duty and that they had been keeping the Government inform-



ed of the up-to-date developments about the Gurdwara reform movement.<sup>116</sup>

Following this advice of the Government of India, the Home Member of the Panjab Government made repeated statements in the Panjab Legislative Council supporting the action of the local officials. Thus, while C.M. King tried to justify the action of the subordinate officers, his own action in addressing a letter to the Mahants and holding meetings with them was justified by his superior, Sir John Maynard, the Home Member, Panjab, declaring that 'the object of the letter to which reference is made by the questioner, was merely to inform the Mahants of their legal remedies in the event of illegal attempts being made to dispossess them. . . . The letter contains nothing to which exception can reasonably be taken . . .' Similarly, when a question was asked in the Panjab Legislative Council about the inaction of the police officials and the C I D., Sir John Maynard fully justified the role of the concerned officials.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, the Panjab Government exonerated the guilty officials.

Though outwardly the authorities in the Panjab, and the higher bureaucracy in Delhi, seemed to be united with regard to their stand on the Akali Movement, a careful perusal of the secret note in the Government of India files indicates that there was a serious difference of opinion. The Panjab Government's policy with regard to the Akali Movement was not approved of by the Viceroy in the Council, who complained that the Government of India was never consulted in the matter.

The Nankana tragedy and the inaction of the local officials and indirect responsibility of the local Government made the higher authorities in Delhi and London think that there was an urgent need to change the earlier 'policy of non-interference in the religious affairs of the minority community'. The Government of India's criticism that 'the difficulty was largely the failure of the Panjab Government to deal with the Akali Movement firmly and consistently from the beginning', provided the authorities in the Panjab with the much needed handle to initiate the new policy of (i) weakening the growing Akali agitation with promises of 'suitable legislation' and (ii) suppressing the extremists in the Akali leadership under the



pretext of maintaining law and order. It was the implementation of this new policy which resulted in direct confrontation between the bureaucracy, supported by the Mahants, priests and other vested interests on the one hand and the Sikh masses and Akali leadership backed by the Indian National Congress and other nationalist forces in the country on the other.



## STRUGGLE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT

The Nankana tragedy and the subsequent policy of repression initiated by the Panjab Government proved a turning point in the brief history of the Akali Movement and also the British Government's policy towards the Sikhs. The local officials' support to Narain Das and other Mahants; their responsibility for the massacre of the Akalis at Nankana and the judicial machinery's attempts to protect the vested interests, convinced the Akali leadership that the Government was for its own obvious reasons backing the vested interests. Realising that it was not possible to oust the corrupt and undesirable Mahants and other priests till the Government was compelled to give up its support for them, the Akalis broadened the scope of their initial struggle for Gurdwara reform. After ensuring active cooperation and support from the nationalist press, the Indian National Congress and other nationalist forces in the country, the Akalis launched a two-pronged struggle directed against the Mahants, priests and other vested interests in the Sikh shrines on the one hand and against their supporter, the British Government in the Panjab, on the other. Under the new programme of non-violent non-cooperation which received the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, Akali struggle against a foreign Government became a synonym for struggle for reform in the Sikh shrines. Akali agitation over the Keys' Affair and later their struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh are two important manifestations of a popular movement in the province backed by the forces of nationalism in the country.



**The Keys' Affair**

The Golden Temple, the Akal Takhat and the adjoining Gurdwaras had passed into the control of the Akalis in October 1920. Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, the Government-appointed Manager of the Golden Temple, was holding the office of Secretary of the new Committee of Management appointed by the S.G.P.C. Realising the force of public opinion, he decided to fall in line with the party of reform.<sup>1</sup> Though the S.G.P.C. and the Committee appointed by it virtually controlled the affairs of the Golden Temple, the fact that the keys of the Toshakhana were still in the possession of a Government-appointed Manager gave the reformers the feeling of continued Government control over the Gurdwaras. At its meeting held on 29 October 1921, the Executive Committee of the S.G.P.C. asked Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia to hand over the keys to Sardar Kharak Singh, the President of the S.G.P.C. Even before the resolution was made public, the news reached the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, who decided to forestall the manoeuvre by immediately sending Lala Amar Nath, an Extra Assistant Commissioner, accompanied by a police party to Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia to collect the keys of the Toshakhana. The latter handed over a bunch of 53 keys to him and obtained a formal receipt.

A period of intense agitational activity followed the surrender of the keys. The Panjab press, particularly the pro-Akali newspapers, reacted very sharply. While censuring the Government for taking over the keys of the Golden Temple, the *Panth Sewak* wrote, 'What right has a foreign Government to interfere in the affairs of the Gurdwaras?'<sup>2</sup> The *Akali* expressed its resentment in the following manner: 'On the one hand the keys of the temple have been taken away and on the other the bureaucracy has crossed all limits in telling lies. . . .'<sup>3</sup> *Bande Matram* came out with very interesting comments: 'It is like a person filing an application in the Court that he has stolen the property of another and asking the Court to direct the latter to get back the same. . . .'<sup>4</sup>

Criticism in the press was followed by public condemnation of the official action in various parts of the Panjab. According to the report of a C.I.D. official:



Jathas from different parts of the Panjab reached Amritsar on the 11th of November. . . . A meeting was organised in the evening in the Bagh Akalian to protest against the action of the Deputy Commissioner. Sardar Kharak Singh and Jaswant Singh delivered violent speeches. The non-cooperators dominated the affairs and others were not allowed to speak. . . .<sup>5</sup>

In another meeting at Akal Takhat on the same day, the S.G.P.C. decided not to allow the newly appointed Sarbrah, Honorary Captain Bahadur Singh, to interfere in the affairs of the Golden Temple in any way.<sup>6</sup> At another protest meeting held at Lahore on 12 November, 1921 the action of the Government was criticised and the Sikh members of Legislative Council were asked to vacate their seats.<sup>7</sup> Protest meetings were also held at Gujranwala, Gujar Khan and other places.<sup>8</sup> As a mark of protest it was decided not to illuminate the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras on the occasion of the birthday of Guru Nanak on 15 November 1921.<sup>9</sup> According to a C.I.D. note, 'orders were issued from the Akal Takhat asking the Sikh soldiers to give up service and some of them had agreed to abide by the instructions of the Akali leadership'.<sup>10</sup>

Overwhelmed by the deluge of protest and indignation engulfing the central districts of the Panjab and facing the danger of its undermining the loyalty of Sikh troops in the Indian Army, the Government of India advised the authorities in the Panjab that the only way to counter the movement of non-cooperation among the Sikhs was, 'to successfully prosecute five or six leading men, especially Dan Singh and Jaswant Singh'.<sup>11</sup> In compliance with these instructions, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar arrested these leaders of the non-cooperation movement while they were addressing a Sikh Diwan at Ajnala on 26 November 1921 on the plea that 'they were discussing a "political question" which had been prohibited under Seditious Meetings Act'.<sup>12</sup> According to *The Akali*, 'the two leaders, Sardar Dan Singh and Sardar Jaswant Singh, were arrested and handcuffed even before they could deliver any speech'.<sup>13</sup>

The Akali reaction was immediate. As soon as the news of these arrests reached Amritsar, the S.G.P.C., which was in



session at the Akal Takhat, adjourned its meeting to Ajnala. Soon, more than 50 members reached Ajnala and continued the proceedings of the Diwan.<sup>14</sup> The authorities declared the assembly illegal and immediately arrested all its members.<sup>15</sup> However, the arrests, instead of checking the advance of the movement gave it a fresh fillip. The S.G.P.C., by a resolution called upon the Sikhs 'to hold religious Diwans everywhere to explain the facts about the Keys' Affair.'<sup>16</sup> The resolution further advised the Sikhs to observe hartal on the day of the arrival of the Prince of Wales on Indian shores.<sup>17</sup> Further, Sikh soldiers and pensioners were asked not to attend any of the functions in honour of the Prince.<sup>18</sup> The boycott move of the Akali leadership seems to have frightened the authorities in the Panjab to such an extent that they decided to cancel the scheduled visit of the Prince to Amritsar.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, more arrests were made. Sardar Amar Singh Jhabal, acting President of the S.G.P.C., Master Tara Singh, Jaswant Singh, Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh, Bhai Tara Singh and Bhai Kartar Singh, soon found themselves behind the bars for having discussed the prohibited 'Keys' issue.<sup>20</sup> The movement became intense when the arrested leaders, who refused to put up any defence on the plea that they were non-cooperators, were convicted and awarded rigorous punishments.<sup>21</sup>

Official action in arresting the Akali leaders and awarding them rigorous sentences and fines greatly added to the popularity of the movement. Reports of the C.I.D. officials that 'the agitation was spreading fast to the rural areas of the Sikh districts of the Panjab, particularly Lahore and Amritsar',<sup>22</sup> combined with similar reports from the Military authorities of the serious effects on Sikh troops seem to have disturbed the authorities who started devising a method to get out of the difficult situation. Along with the suppression of the popular movement, the Government also tried to solve the complicated questions of the 'Keys'. When it realised that no Sikh was prepared to accept the office of the Sarbrah at the hands of the Government, it thought of appointing a committee of a few moderate Sikhs.<sup>23</sup> But in the face of mass and determined opposition from the Sikhs, even the moderates dared not accept the official offer. The S.G.P.C. passed a resolution on 6 December 1921 that 'no Sikh should agree to any arrange-



ment about the restoration of the keys unless and until all the Sikhs arrested in connection with the Keys' Affair are released unconditionally'.<sup>24</sup> According to Mahatma Gandhi, the Government in the Panjab was in a real dilemma:

If it releases the Sikhs it would be ridiculed and the strength of the Sikhs will increase two-fold. If it does not release them their strength will increase ten-fold. It must, therefore, decide whether it should be wiser for it to allow the Sikhs' strength to increase ten times or to release the Sikh prisoners and be laughed at taking consolation in the fact that the strength of Sikhs will then only be doubled.<sup>25</sup>

To get out of the dilemma the Government began showing anxiety to negotiate with the leaders of the movement with a view to find a solution.<sup>26</sup> The resulting discussions having been satisfactorily concluded, a communique appeared on 12 January 1922 stating:

The Government has accordingly decided to make a final withdrawal of its connection as executive Government with the management of the Durbar Sahib and to leave any further proceedings that may be thought necessary to the Sikh community itself. So far as the Government is concerned it is prepared to leave the administration as it now stands, in the hands of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and to allow the keys to be given over at once to that Committee. . . .<sup>27</sup>

And on 17 January 1922, all those arrested in connection with the agitation over the Keys' Affair were released unconditionally. When even after securing the unconditional release of the prisoners, the Akali leadership refused to collect the keys from the District Magistrate, a gazetted officer of the Panjab Government was sent to deliver the keys to Baba Kharak Singh, President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee in a Diwan specially arranged for the purpose.<sup>28</sup>

The unconditional release of the Akali prisoners and



surrender of the keys to Baba Kharak Singh has been described by a contemporary European writer in the following manner:

Never was there a more shameful defeat. One thinks irresistibly of the capture of Calais by an English King when the leading citizens had to bring the keys to him clothed only in shirts and with ropes round their necks . . . The Panjab Government had humbled itself to the dust before the Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee . . .<sup>29</sup>

The defeat of the Government was viewed by the nationalist leaders in the country, who had been backing the Akalis in their struggle against the bureaucracy, as a decisive victory for the forces of nationalism. Mahatma Gandhi sent the following telegram to Baba Kharak Singh :

‘FIRST BATTLE FOR INDIA’S FREEDOM WON.  
CONGRATULATIONS.’<sup>30</sup>

In its anxiety not to alienate the Sikhs any further or to allow their movement to gain momentum as a result of repressive measures, the Government seems to have made a virtual surrender to the Akalis. In its efforts to win back the Sikhs, the Government changed its earlier stand. The actions of the leaders of the movement, whom the judicial machinery had sentenced to rigorous imprisonments for ‘political activities’, were now explained away as due to ‘excitement based on the action taken by the Government in respect of the Durbar Sahib *rather than due to the desire to join in any campaign of disobedience to the law*’.<sup>31</sup> In the light of the statements given by the Akali leaders earlier at the time of their prosecution, the changed official version appears rather ridiculous. These leaders had more than once proclaimed that ‘they were non-co-operators and were not prepared to offer any defence as *they had no regard for a foreign Government, its Courts and the law*’.<sup>32</sup> The extract from Baba Kharak Singh’s statement in the court makes this stand crystal-clear :

As the Government is a party to this prosecution and the Judge is one of its servants, I, therefore, do not wish to make any statement. My position as President of the Sikh



Panth is like that of the Presidents of the United States, France and Germany.<sup>33</sup>

That the whole Sikh community was expressing its feelings of hatred for foreign rule through its struggle for the reform of Gurdwaras is borne out by the statements of other Akali leaders. Perusal of these statements shows that anti-British feelings dominated the political scene in those days. In the course of their statements in the court, these leaders made the following significant remarks :

I have no regards for the present Government, nor do I consider these courts as places of justice as they belong to a Government which is mad under the intoxication of power . . . .<sup>34</sup> (Dan Singh)

Sardar Dan Singh had the courage to tell the judicial authorities that the justice administered in the courts was arbitrary when he stated at the end of the above-mentioned statement ' . . . announce to us the sentence which you have already decided in the club a day earlier'.<sup>35</sup>

It seems that in administering justice the judiciary was merely implementing the predetermined decisions of the executive based on political expediency. Other leaders also defied the law in a similar fashion :

I do not consider this court as a place of justice nor do I expect any justice from the British Government . . . . Making a statement is useless<sup>36</sup> (Bhag Singh, Pleader)

and again

There is no Government, no justice and hence no statement.<sup>37</sup> (Master Sunder Singh)

It was this spirit of defiance that was working behind the movement of Gurdwara reform launched by the Akalis and behind their struggle against the authority of the British Government. A careful perusal of the statements reveals how the awe of the constituted authority, its officials, judges and police had disappeared from the minds of the people in the province. Attempts of the Government to win back the Sikhs failed. The hope expressed in the communique that 'the



cordial relations which have hitherto been maintained between the Government and the Sikhs may continue uninterrupted for the perpetual benefit of the Government and the community', proved a far cry. Profession of 'goodwill and friendliness' could no longer lure the Akali leadership which had travelled a long way from 'unfailing loyalty and staunch support' to 'open defiance of authority'. The community had awakened from slumber and its religious places could no longer be misused either for the pleasure and profits of the Mahants or strengthening the hands of a foreign Government. No saropas could now be offered to the Prince of Wales and no prayers held for his well-being. Even his scheduled visit to Amritsar had to be cancelled and the receptions arranged in his honour at Lahore and other places were boycotted.<sup>38</sup>

### **Struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh**

The Akali struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh<sup>39</sup> is another landmark in the history of the Akali Movement and movement of non-violent non-co-operation in the country. It was here that the Akalis were able to demonstrate the efficacy of the weapon of peaceful satyagraha by their strict adherence to the vow of non-violence and thus set a new example to inspire the forces of nationalism in the country. Their firm faith shook the authorities whose immoral use of power was exposed by the patient sufferings of peaceful Akalis.

The Gurdwara reform movement acquired national dimensions and a new meaning when at Guru-ka-Bagh the repressive policies of the Government met with firm resistance by people inspired by the ideal of non-violent satyagraha. The Guru-ka-Bagh struggle was made an 'issue' by the Government of the Panjab whose dummy Mahant became a mere tool in the hands of the British official for the execution of the new policy of repression resorted to by the Government to retrieve the prestige it had lost with the Akali victory in the agitation over the 'Keys' Affair'.

Sunder Das, the Mahant of Guru-ka-Bagh, kept mistresses and indulged in immoral practices.<sup>40</sup> When the Gurdwara reform movement gained momentum and the Golden Temple and other important Gurdwaras had come under the control of the



S.G.P.C., the attention of the Akali reformers was drawn towards Guru-ka-Bagh.

On 31 January 1921, some Sikhs under the leadership of Sardar Dan Singh went to Guru-ka-Bagh with a view to persuading the Mahant to improve his ways and reach an understanding with the reformers.<sup>41</sup> The Mahant yielding to the pressure, signed an agreement on terms dictated by the Akalis and agreed to serve under a Committee of Management consisting of 11 members appointed by the S.G.P.C.<sup>42</sup>

After the Nankana tragedy and the repressive policy of the Panjab Government, this Mahant, like many others, went back on his promise and relapsed into evil ways. On noticing the change in the Mahant's attitude the S.G.P.C. took over the management of the Gurdwara on 23 August 1921 while the land attached to the shrine continued to remain in the possession of the Mahant.<sup>43</sup> He tried to regain the possession of the Gurdwara through the intercession of local officials but failed. He, therefore, had to re-enter into a compromise with the Akalis.<sup>44</sup> But this new compromise was also not destined to last long; not because of the Mahant but as a result of the policy of the Panjab Government with regard to the Akali Movement.

As stated earlier, the Panjab Government wanted some excuse or the other to implement the new policy towards the Akali Movement which had been decided by the higher authorities in Delhi. A convenient issue was found in what was otherwise a very insignificant incident of felling of a dry *kikkar* tree by the Akalis on the land attached to the Gurdwara. According to the official statement : 'The Mahant complained to the police of the theft of his property from his land.'<sup>45</sup> It is strange that a dry *kikkar* tree was described as 'property' to enable the Mahant to lodge a complaint with the local police. Moreover, ever since the occupation of the Gurdwara by the Akalis, wood from the land attached to it had been used for the community kitchen and the Mahant had not previously raised any objection.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, using this minor incident as an excuse, the authorities arrested five Akalis on 9 August 1922 and put them on trial.<sup>47</sup> They were convicted of theft by Mr. Ivan Jenkins, a first-class Magistrate of Amritsar, and were sentenced to six months' imprisonment and to a fine of Rs. 50 each. According to the S.G.P.C. communiques and the



version of the incident by some contemporaries such as Teja Singh, Ruchi Ram Sahni and Sohan Singh Josh, the Akalis were arrested *not on the complaint of the Mahant, but under orders from Mr. J.M. Dunnett*, the District Magistrate of Amritsar. This was on the basis of the confidential diary of Bedi Brij Lal, a Zaildar of village Mahilawala.<sup>48</sup> It was on the day after the arrests, when Mr. Beaty, the Additional Superintendent of Police, accompanied by other police officials, reached Guru-ka-Bagh that the complaint of Mahant Sundar Das was obtained in support of a step which had already been decided upon.<sup>49</sup>

It seems that the official action against the Akalis in anticipation of a formal complaint from the Mahant was in keeping with the instructions issued to Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners in the Panjab by the Home Secretary.<sup>50</sup> On the face of it, the incident was too insignificant to become an issue for a long-drawn struggle and a trial of strength between the powerful machinery of the Panjab Government, backed by the Government of India, and the peaceful Akalis, supported by the force of country-wide nationalism and public opinion in India.

As pointed out earlier, in the complaint of Mahant Sundar Das about the 'theft of his property' the authorities in the Panjab found a convenient excuse to implement their new policy of suppressing the Akali Movement by force. The action of the local authorities in instituting criminal proceedings against the Akalis for cutting wood from the land attached to the Guru-ka-Bagh was seen by the Akali leadership as a fresh challenge. To protest against the official high-handedness and to assert their right to chop wood for the free community kitchen, Jathas of five volunteers each started marching towards Guru-ka-Bagh. A new wave of enthusiasm spread among the Akalis in different parts of the province which soon encouraged Akali Jathas from the surrounding areas to pour into Guru-ka-Bagh to help in the cutting and storing of wood for the Gurdwara kitchen. The police remained inactive to begin with; they were perhaps awaiting fresh instructions to deal with this serious turn of events. Then on 22 August 1922, large-scale arrests of the Akalis commenced. As the wood-cutting continued, all those reaching the Guru-ka-Bagh were arrested on



charges of riot, theft and trespass. By 25 August 1922, the number of Akalis arrested there rose to 210. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, who had earlier gone to Simla to discuss the situation with the higher authorities, returned with new plans for tackling the situation. It seems that the local Government had realised that the arrests and the long sentences could not overawe the Akalis, whose number, according to official estimates, had swelled to 4,000 by 28 August. Noticing that the arrests of such large number of volunteers would create problems, a new method of dispersing the Akalis by force was adopted instead.

To check the continued influx of Akali Jathas and their supporters and sympathisers, police pickets were placed on all the roads leading to Guru-ka-Bagh. Arrangements were also made to prevent the Jathas from reaching Amritsar by rail or by road. By an order of Mr. J.M. Dunnett, the District Magistrate of Amritsar, the Akali gatherings at Guru-ka-Bagh were declared unlawful assemblies. Also, consignors and carriers rushing supplies to them were warned that 'they were engaged in the commission of a cognizable offence under Section 143/109 of Indian Penal Code' and were prevented from doing so under Section 149 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The District Magistrate also directed the police picket commanders at Ranewala and Chhinawala bridges on the Lahore branch of the Upper Bari Doab 'to prevent the transmission of such supplies to the illegal assemblies at Guru-ka-Bagh'.<sup>51</sup> Following this directive the police officials started seizing all the provisions and medical supplies being sent by the S.G.P.C. and other welfare associations to Guru-ka-Bagh for the use of the wounded Akalis there.

In spite of these preventive measures, Akalis continued to pour into Amritsar, and Jathas consisting of 55, 60, 100 and sometimes even 200 Akalis marched to Guru-ka-Bagh daily after taking a vow of non-violence at Akal Takhat, Amritsar. According to contemporary Akali sources, these Jathas were usually stopped by groups of police officials and beaten with sticks in order to disable them from proceeding towards the garden.<sup>52</sup> Undeterred by the police beatings, the Jathas continued to march towards Guru-ka-Bagh. On the evening of 29 August 1922, a Jatha of 50 Akalis started from Akal Takhat



but was stopped at Ranewala Bridge and on its refusal to disperse, its members were placed under nominal arrest and kept there. Another Jatha of 50 arrived the next day whereupon both Jathas were allowed to cross the bridge under a heavy shower of lathi blows. As a result of the beating, 30 injured members of the Jatha had to be left behind, some of them 'in very serious condition'.<sup>53</sup> They were later taken to Amritsar for treatment. Another Jatha of 60 Akalis which left Akal Takhat on 31 August was overtaken by the police during the night at the Chhina Bridge 'where the members were attacked by Mr. Beaty and his policemen with lathis and more than half of them were rendered unconscious'.<sup>54</sup> The next day another Jatha of 120 members was surrounded by foot and mounted police near the Guntalā Bridge and dispersed by the use of severe force.

The increasing use of force on the Akali Jathas in the face of their totally-non-violent approach had a great impact on the general public in the Panjab and outside. The S.G.P.C. appealed to men of independent opinion, journalists and national leaders 'to come and watch the non-violent spiritual struggle that was going on at Guru-ka-Bagh to obviate the possibility of misrepresentation at the hands of clever bureaucracy'.<sup>55</sup> Several national leaders, Hindu and Muslim, members of the Legislative Council and press representatives converged on Guru-ka-Bagh. The reports of the pressmen and the Akali leaders' press statements on their arrest earlier (on 25 August 1922) when published in various newspapers in India and England aroused public opinion against the highhanded and brutal policy of the Government. Prominent leaders and workers of the Congress and the Khilafat movements reached Amritsar. On 10 September, the Akali Diwan at Amritsar was attended by Swami Shardhanand, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maulana Kifayat Ullah, Kumari Lajawanti and Sayed Atta Ullah Shah. All of them who addressed the Jathas assured the Akali leadership of the support of the Hindus and Muslims.<sup>56</sup> In this Diwan an American cinematographer, Cap. A.L. Verges, was also present, who later filmed the beatings of the Akalis at the Guru-ka-Bagh and produced a short film entitled 'Exclusive Picture of India's Martyrdom'. He described the Akali morchas at Guru-ka-Bagh as 'A unique struggle in



human history and a peaceful rebellion against the constituted authority'.<sup>57</sup>

In another public meeting held at Jallianwala on 10 September under the presidentship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya which was attended by more than 13,000 persons including nearly 1,000 women and 5,000 Akalis, action of the police at Guru-ka-Bagh was severely criticised. In the course of his speech Pandit Malaviya declared that 'it is the duty of every Indian to express hatred and contempt for the actions of the Government and raise unanimous voice to demand a change of policy'.<sup>58</sup> Resolutions were passed expressing hatred of, and contempt for, the oppressive, inhuman and uncivilised treatment meted out to the Akalis and demanding an immediate end to this policy. Protests of C.F. Andrews,<sup>59</sup> a Christian Missionary, who described the official action as 'inhuman, brutal, foul, cowardly and incredible to an Englishman and a moral defeat of England',<sup>60</sup> and who later, during his meeting with the Governor of the Panjab, told him that he had seen with his own eyes hundreds of Christs being crucified at Guru-ka-Bagh<sup>61</sup> might have had some effect in compelling the local authorities for serious rethinking. Confidential reports regarding the ruthlessness of the police officials at the Guru-ka-Bagh in which some respectable people of independent opinion, members of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, and press representatives were also jostled, chased and given blows with sticks, made the authorities realise that apart from the bad name which the Government had earned in the press in and outside India, the action was likely to alienate the moderate element in the Sikh community. All these factors forced the Government to contemplate a change in the method of operating against the Akalis—the object still remaining the same, *i.e.*, to suppress the movement and to break the Akali organisation. In a confidential note dated 9 September 1922, H.V.B. Hare Scott, wrote, 'This beating has proved ineffective and it has been decided to stop it. Mr. Tollton is leaving for Amritsar today to devise other means of dealing with the situation'.<sup>62</sup>

On 13 September 1922, the Governor of Panjab accompanied by other Members of his Executive Council, visited Amritsar and later proceeded to Guru-ka-Bagh where he inspected all the arrangements. On his return a conference of



the Members of the Government and the local officers was held where 'it was decided that the method of forcibly repelling the intruders should be discontinued'.<sup>62</sup> That public opinion had played an important role in compelling the Government to change its policy is borne out by the following extract from the Government statement regarding Guru-ka-Bagh :

There is also no doubt that these stories and the sight of these injuries have excited a large measure of sympathy for the Akalis on the part of loyal and moderate Sikhs and other persons not generally in sympathy with the Akali movement.<sup>64</sup>

Equally important were factors like the growing sympathy for the Akalis in the neighbouring villages and the reported 'attempts to create excitement in Sikh units of the Indian Army'. The fact that the Sikh Jathas going to Guru-ka-Bagh contained a fairly large number of ex-soldiers greatly alarmed the authorities.

But the change in policy should not be taken to mean that the authorities were in any way interested in coming to terms with the Akali leadership and were prepared to pass a Bill for Gurdwara management to its satisfaction. In fact the change was merely tactical; the object was still the same—suppression of the agitation. The authorities were waiting for another suitable opportunity to strike hard. The officials devised a strategy using the excellent rainfall which the districts of Central Panjab had had in the meantime. District-level officials reported that the Sikh peasantry, which was the backbone of the Akali Movement, would no longer be able to stay away from the fields during the sowing season which would thus leave the Akali leadership in lurch with depleted forces.<sup>65</sup> Equally optimistic were the reports of the C.I.D. officials that "the Committee is also finding it difficult to feed the large number of Akalis gathered in Amritsar and has decided to reduce the numbers."<sup>66</sup>

The local Government also held the opinion that apart from the above-mentioned factors, which were likely to weaken the movement, future official action at a remote place like Guru-ka-Bagh (three or four kilometers away from the main



road) would be 'far less spectacular than the forcible dispersal of Jathas on a metalled road only a few kilometers away from the city of Amritsar and the absence of crowds of sympathising spectators, press-reporters and photographers, would diminish the zeal of the would-be martyrs'.<sup>67</sup> But the events which followed soon after showed how erroneous the official machinery was in its calculations.

The Government resumed the earlier method of arrests with the addition that now the Akalis were severely beaten up before their arrest. Under the new arrangements police pickets blocking the road to Guru-ka-Bagh were strengthened and the army was called in to assist the police in case of emergency. Long barbed wire entanglements were also erected around the place under dispute, leaving only one narrow passage to serve as both entrance and exit.<sup>68</sup> According to an eyewitness: 'It was an elaborate arrangement with a base about ten feet in breadth and tapered to a point which was considerably higher than the tallest man.'<sup>69</sup>

While the Government and the Akali leadership were busy discussing terms for a settlement, Jathas of Akalis continued marching to Guru-ka-Bagh to establish their right to cut wood. By this time, the policemen on duty there had been specially drilled and trained in administering lathi blows on the private parts as well as on the feet and legs of the Akalis and a special booklet on the use of the lathi had been prepared for their use.<sup>70</sup> According to a statement of press representatives and other eye-witness, the beating of the Akalis at Guru-ka-Bagh was done in a most merciless and brutal manner.<sup>71</sup> Even the confidential notes of the C.I.D. mention that 'some lathi blows were given about the private parts of the Akalis, that this was done with considerable force and intentionally, and that the *keshas* of the Akalis were pulled.'<sup>72</sup> This new technique of beating the Akalis which seems to have appealed to Mr. Beaty, the police officer in-charge of the operations at Guru-ka-Bagh was continued for about a fortnight.

But these measures did not discourage the Akalis who continued to march towards Guru-ka-Bagh in ever-increasing numbers. Arrests and beatings could no longer deter them and jails held no terror for them. The Akali Jathas vied with each other for precedence to proceed to Guru-ka-Bagh.<sup>73</sup> The



reports of the C.I.D. officials and the old registers in the Panjab State Archives at Patiala containing details about the Akalis proceeding to Guru-ka-Bagh and Jaito confirm the S.G.P.C.'s claim that the number of the Akalis offering themselves for arrest was on the increase.<sup>74</sup> According to an official report the number on 24-25 September had gone upto 80 a day. Even so, interestingly enough, the bureaucracy at Delhi was trying to belittle the effect of the movement by sending telegrams to the Secretary of State for India stating that the S.G.P.C. was finding it difficult to attract sufficient number of volunteers to court arrest at Guru-ka-Bagh.<sup>75</sup>

While the struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh continued unabated, a high-level conference was called on 3 October 1922 at the Viceregal Lodge, Simla. It was attended by the Viceroy and the Governor of the Panjab and Members of their respective Councils.<sup>76</sup> The most important item on the agenda was the policy of the Panjab Government *vis-a-vis* the 'existing Sikh situation'. The reports which the Government of India had received were conflicting. Some indicated that the supply of volunteers was almost unlimited; while others stated that it was drying up. According to official figures the total number of arrested Akalis had gone upto to 8,000; the jails in the Panjab could accommodate only another 900 persons.<sup>77</sup> The Governor informed the Viceroy that 'with the stoppage of beating of the Akalis a good deal of excitement over Guru-ka-Bagh had subsided'. He also informed the Viceroy that effects to bring about a compromise between the Mahant and the Akalis had failed and the Deputy Commissioner had been asked if he could arrange for a Sikh to sue for a declaratory decree that those in occupation of the Gurdwara were entitled to cut wood on the Mahant's land.<sup>78</sup>

This last suggestion by the Governor shows that the Government had realised that it was difficult to suppress the growing Akali Movement by mass arrests. The experiment in dispersal had failed earlier and could not be revived. The Government found itself in a difficult situation indeed; it was now on the look-out for some face-saving device to extricate itself from the mess. In the circumstances the only way open to it was to pass a fresh Gurdwara Bill and thereby put an end to the struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh. But no legislative measure



could be successful without the cooperation of the S.G.P.C. and other Akali leaders who refused to extend any support to such official effort till the release of all the Akali prisoners arrested in connection with the Guru-ka-Bagh.<sup>79</sup>

Outwardly, the Government was busy making announcements that the jail officials had been asked to make arrangements for 5,000 to 10,000 more Akalis, though it was inwardly perturbed at the increasing number of Akali prisoners. Severe beating at Guru-ka-Bagh was intended to discourage the fresh Jathas from offering themselves for arrest but the Akalis, who knew about the sufferings they were to undergo and had come prepared for them, continued pouring in an ever-increasing numbers. On 19 October 1922 the number of those arrested in connection with Guru-ka-Bagh had gone up to 2,457.<sup>80</sup>

On 25 October 1922, the situation at Guru-ka-Bagh took a new turn when an exclusive Akali Jatha of 101 military pensioners under the leadership of Subedar-Major Amar Singh was arrested and 'its members were stripped so completely naked that nothing but *Kachhairas* were left on their persons.'<sup>81</sup> Another pensioners' Jatha of 103 persons marched from Amritsar on 12 November under the leadership of Risaldar Ranjodh Singh. The pensioners' open conflict with the authorities could have dangerous implications. The Sikh soldiers in the Indian Army were bound to be affected. Photographs of the beatings of the Akalis, including the military pensioners, and other Akali propaganda material had reached some of the Sikh units in spite of the tight measures of the Army authorities to prevent the leakage of such information.

The very real danger that the Sikh soldiers would be affected and the rumours that the Sikh graduates of Khalsa College, Amritsar, were being asked to join the Jathas to Guru-ka-Bagh brought home to the authorities the imperative need for an immediate solution. Moreover, contrary to the Governments' expectation that its repressive action at a remote village (Guru-ka-Bagh) would not attract sympathisers, spectators, press reporters and photographers, a large number of them continued to visit the place. They played a major role in exposing the brutality of the police by publishing accounts of such actions in the newspapers. Later, the press representatives of



some leading newspapers in the country issued a Joint Statement<sup>82</sup> on 4 August 1922. This contained a report of police excesses at Guru-ka-Bagh and of the denial of the access to visitors and newspapermen to the place. Also listed in the statement were accounts by eyewitnesses of the indecent treatment meted out to them and to certain prominent public men.

The Indian National Congress not only continued its support by sending its observers but took even greater interest in the Akali affairs. At a special meeting of its Working Committee, held on 17 September 1922, two resolutions were adopted—one strongly condemning the police brutalities and the other appointing a Sub-Committee to conduct an enquiry into the Guru-ka-Bagh affair and the high-handedness of the police officials.<sup>83</sup> Other national leaders, among them Madan Mohan Malaviya, Hakim Ajmal Khan and many members of the Legislative Assembly and the Panjab Legislative Council, continued to visit Guru-ka-Bagh and issued statements contradicting the official reports that 'minimum force was being used in dealing with the Akalis'.<sup>84</sup> The Congress Sub-Committee published a report highly critical of official policy after examining more than 110 eyewitnesses to the police brutalities and who formed a cross-section of social and political strata—Congressmen, Khilafatis, moderates, extremists, press reporters, Members of the Panjab Legislative Council, doctors, etc.<sup>85</sup>

Propaganda in the press and on the platform, reports of Congress and other national leaders, statements of the press representatives, exposure of the police high-handedness by the Publicity Committee of the S.G.P.C., reports by C.I.D. officials about rumours of the adverse effect on the Sikh soldiers in the Indian Army, on the moderates and the loyalists and the peasantry, criticism in England and the United States,<sup>86</sup> all these factors seem to have unnerved the authorities in the Panjab as well as at Delhi and London. They wanted an immediate escape from this situation, but at the same time did not wish to suffer further loss of prestige which they felt had already been lowered by the unconditional release of the Akali prisoners in connection with the 'Keys' Affair'.

A retired Government Engineer, Rai Bahadur Sir Ganga Ram, found a way out of the tangle by leasing the land of the Guru-ka-Bagh from the Mahant then allowing the Akalis to



cut wood.<sup>87</sup> As soon as Sir Ganga Ram informed the Deputy Commissioner of his action, the police were withdrawn from the Guru-ka-Bagh. The barbed wire around its enclosures was removed and the Akalis took possession of the land attached to the Guru-ka-Bagh.

Thus, suddenly and most undramatically, ended the long-drawn struggle in which more than 1,500 Akalis were injured and over 5,000 suffered imprisonment.<sup>88</sup>

Officials in the Panjab were happy that this solution had saved their respect and at the same time left the Akali leadership with no field for manoeuvre. In a letter dated 17 November 1922, addressed to S.P. O'Donnell, H.D. Craik, while conveying the 'good news' that the arrest of daily Jathas had ended, wrote: 'The S.G.P.C. will probably be taken aback but they will be confronted by a *fait accompli*, which they will find it difficult to represent as a defeat of the Government, the agreement between the Mahant and his tenant being a contract between two private persons.'<sup>89</sup> But contrary to such wishful thinking, the S.G.P.C., which had known about the mischief of the bureaucracy, was neither taken aback by the news nor disposed to accept it as a defeat of its programme. In a communique issued much earlier than the official announcement, it warned the Akalis that 'the Government is going to take a step which will prevent people from being arrested. It is alleged that the Government is just going to hint the Mahant to lease his land to a public spirited man who will not object to the trees being cut and thus arrests will cease.' Further, the communique warned the Sikhs that 'they should not be trapped in this way but should go on offering themselves for arrest'<sup>90</sup> In fact, this early exposure of the plan forced the Governor of the Panjab to contradict the S.G.P.C.'s version in the Legislative Council: 'There is no truth', he said, 'in the allegation that the Mahant is being persuaded to lease his land to some public spirited man'.<sup>91</sup>

But the secret correspondence between the Panjab Government and the higher officials of the Government of India informing the latter of the latest developments about the Akali Movement and the public announcement a few days later of the lease of land reveal the degree of inadequacy of the official machinery in its efforts to conceal its weakness. The very fact



that Sir Ganga Ram was encouraged in his efforts by the Government (and this is admitted by two high officials of the Panjab Government—H.D. Craik and Sir John Maynard)<sup>92</sup> shows that it was the Government that wanted an escape-route and not the 'public spirited man' or the S.G.P.C. A loyal friend was thus used as a cat's paw to pull the Government's chestnuts out of a fire of its own making through its miscalculation of Akali strength and determination.

From the S.G.P.C. communiques and the statements of S.B. Mehtab Singh, we learn that the local Government initially tried to persuade the Akali leaders through Nawab Aslam Hiyyat to meet Sir Ganga Ram and work out some sort of a compromise by fixing a certain maintenance allowance for the Mahant.<sup>93</sup> When the Akali leaders refused to accept any compromise till the unconditional release of all the prisoners, Sir Ganga Ram is said to have told them that 'the Governor of Panjab is making efforts to get the Government out of this difficulty somehow or the other',<sup>94</sup> and that 'the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Dunnett, is eager for a compromise with the Akali leaders'.<sup>95</sup> The only difference was that while the Akalis wanted the release of the prisoners before the passage of the Bill, Mr. Dunnett agreed to their release only after passage of the Bill, Mr. Dunnett agreed to their release only after the Bill was passed and accepted by the Sikhs.<sup>96</sup>

Mediation efforts by Sir Ganga Ram solved only one of the many problems of the Government by terminating the daily arrests of the Jathas. The bigger problem of over 5,600 of Akalis lodged in the jails still worried the authorities. Here also an opportunity offered itself soon in the form of Hindu-Muslim riots in Amritsar<sup>97</sup> which broke out on 11 March 1923. The Akali leaders believed that such Hindu-Muslim disunity had no place in the 'city of communal harmony' (the name which Amritsar had come to acquire as a result of the heightened sense of Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity displayed during the Akali Movement).<sup>98</sup> After all, it was with the goodwill and support of the Hindus and the Muslims that the Akalis had successfully launched and won their struggle against the Government at Guru-ka-Bagh. But as the struggle was not yet over, the main goal of the movement would not be achievable without continued communal harmony and the active moral support



of the Hindus and Muslims. Consequently, the S.G.P.C. sent Akali volunteers to patrol the city with a view to maintaining peace, order and harmony, It is clear that the Akalis did not take this step with a view to pleasing the authorities. But the Government took advantage of this incident. In the Akali assistance in maintaining law and order, the authorities found a gesture of goodwill worth reciprocating and decided to unconditionally release all the Akali volunteers arrested in connection with Guru-ka-Bagh morcha.<sup>99</sup>

In ordering the unconditional release of the Akalis this time, the officials were not so much hoping to restore the friendly relations with the Akali leadership (such as existed when the prisoners in the 'Keys Affair' were released) as they were anxious to get rid of the large number of Akali prisoners. The last lines of Craik's letter to J. Crerar illustrate this point:

Whether this hope (of release having ameliorating effect on the relations between the Government and the Sikhs) is realised or not, the recent incident at Amritsar *provides the Government with a good opportunity of getting rid of these prisoners.* . . .

Official repression of the Akali reformers proved a turning point in the history of British relations with the Sikhs. In its efforts to retrieve its prestige the government not only suffered another major reverse but lost the goodwill and sympathy of a whole community. All efforts to win back the Sikhs failed. It was not very surprising therefore to find the Sikhs making a common cause with the nationalist leaders in the country's struggle for freedom, till India attained its Independence in August, 1947.



## ‘ISLANDS OF DESPOTISM

Princely states in India remained ‘islands of despotism’ during the British rule in India. While the Britishers had conquered and annexed most of them to the vast empire that they had established in India a few states retained their nominal sovereignty by accepting the British over-lordship. In Panjab there were half a dozen Sikh princely states which escaped Ranjit Singh’s ambitious plans of conquest and expansion of his empire. While after the defeat of the Sikhs in the two Anglo-Sikh Wars, Panjab was annexed to the British empire, small cis-Satluj Sikh states were allowed to retain their sovereignty because they had already accepted British protectorate. Most prominent among the Sikh princely states were the Phoolkian states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind which traced their origin to a common ancestor named Phul, who was blessed by Guru Hargobind saying his descendents would rule.<sup>1</sup>

As a detailed history of the Akali Movement in the Sikh States—which in fact became a synonym for the State subjects’ struggle against the tyranny of their rulers and may, therefore, form the subject of an independent study<sup>2</sup>—is not within the scope of the present work, this chapter has been limited mainly to the Akali activities in the two important Sikh States, Nabha and Patiala.<sup>3</sup>

### **Akali Involvement in the Nabha Affair**

The abdication<sup>4</sup> of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha and the Akali involvement in the affair is one of the most con-



troversial issues of the Akali Movement. The Maharaja, who ascended the throne on 20 December 1911,<sup>5</sup> was made to abdicate in favour of his minor son, Partap Singh, on 9 July 1923.<sup>6</sup>

According to the official version of the circumstances leading to his abdication, when Justice Stuart was enquiring into the Patiala-Nabha dispute,<sup>7</sup> Narsingha Rao, the Chief Minister of Nabha, on 21 April 1923, submitted proposals to the Government of India to permit the Maharaja temporarily to suspend his control over the administration of the State. This was in order to allow him some rest to recover his health which had been undermined by the tension arising from the Patiala-Nabha dispute and the Government enquiry which was in progress.<sup>8</sup> From a letter which Col. Minchin wrote to J P. Thompson, Political Secretary to Government of India, we learn that Ripudaman Singh went to Kasauli on 5 June 1923 to discuss his difficulties with the Political Agent and to seek his advice in settling his disputes with Patiala. Col. Minchin urged the Maharaja to 'voluntarily sever all his connections with the administration of his state'. He argued that such an action 'would avoid harsher treatment which would result if there were a formal enquiry into the administration of the State'. A few days later, the Maharaja is said to have tentatively agreed to this step, but on certain conditions.<sup>9</sup>

However, the Maharaja contradicted the above-mentioned version. In his letter to Lord Reading, the Viceroy, the Maharaja emphasised that he was intimidated into voluntary retirement by his 'self-seeking officials' and the Political Agent to the Governor-General.<sup>10</sup> Describing the circumstances leading to his decision to retire temporarily from the administration of his State, the Maharaja wrote:

Taking advantage of my exhausted health my self-seeking officials, who, I have come to know, were under the influence of my rivals and officials of the Political Department, overwhelmed me with repeated suggestions to leave my state in their hands and placate the Government by allowing it greater powers of intervention in the affairs of my state.<sup>11</sup>



During the interval between the Maharaja's meeting with Col. Minchin on 5 June 1923 and his abdication on 9 July 1923, certain new developments brought about a material change in the situation. While the Government of India was busy settling the details of the terms on which the Maharaja was to be allowed to sever his connections with the administration of his State and was corresponding with Lord Peel, the Secretary of State for India,<sup>12</sup> for his approval of the terms, the Maharaja had been approached by some extremist Akali leaders like Master Tara Singh, Bawa Harkishan Singh and Teja Singh Samundri.<sup>13</sup> These leaders are said to have advised the Maharaja against severing his connections with his State's administration. According to the Maharaja, they are said to have further assured him vociferously: 'Either you will be restored to the throne or the whole community will die fighting for your cause'.<sup>14</sup>

Assurance of help by the Akali leaders seems to have led the Maharaja revise his stand. Instead of humbly submitting to the wishes of the British or his own officials, the Maharaja started cultivating the radical Sikh leadership. With the help of Akali leaders and his own liberal allowances<sup>15</sup> the Maharaja also won over the editors of some of the pro-Akali papers, among them *Sachha Dhandora*, *Daler-i-Hind*, *Bir Akali* and *Kirpan Bahadur*.<sup>16</sup> It was mainly due to the propaganda of these papers—which depicted the Maharaja as a 'Nationalist Prince', 'an orthodox self-respecting Sikh ruler' and 'religious leader of the Sikh community'<sup>17</sup> and made him the 'Simon de Montfort'<sup>18</sup> of the Indian princes—that the Maharaja was able to win the goodwill and support of the majority of the Sikh community. Another effect of the propaganda of the pro-Akali papers was that the official interference in the Nabha affair was projected among the Sikh masses as 'interference in the Sikh religion', as these papers described Nabha State as 'the Guru's own House' (*Tera ghar mera ase*) on the basis of an old *Hukamnama*<sup>19</sup> issued by Guru Gobind Singh to the ancestors of the Phoolkian family.

The Maharaja's association with the radical Akali leadership and his growing popularity with the Sikh masses as a result of the propaganda in the native press was seen as a potential political danger by the officials who were already



watching with concern the growing popularity of the Akali Movement in the Panjab. In a telegram to Lord Peel, the Secretary of State for India, Lord Reading wrote: '... in the small but turbulent community of the Sikhs he (Maharaja) is a big enough man to cause us a good deal of trouble' and added that 'this risk will be averted to a great extent... if we can get him removed from the sphere of Sikh politics suddenly, by his own act'.<sup>20</sup>

It was with a view to averting the above-mentioned danger that the Viceroy sent Mr. O'Grady, a retired British official, to obtain a letter from the Maharaja severing his connections with the Nabha administration. A combination of tact and threats led the Maharaja to sign the letter of abdication on 7 July 1923.<sup>21</sup> That the Maharaja was an unwilling party to the arrangement is indicated by the report that Col. Minchin sent to the Government of India: 'Mr. O'Grady tells me that he had great difficulty in inducing His Highness to sign this letter.'<sup>22</sup> Col. Minchin then took the Maharaja by surprise: on the morning of 8 July, accompanied by troops and armoured cars, he took control of the Nabha administration and sent the Maharaja to Dehra Dun under military escort.<sup>23</sup>

As the news of the abdication of the Maharaja and his removal to Dehra Dun was made public, the native press, the S.G.P.C., the Akali and the nationalist leadership reacted sharply. Pro-Akali newspapers, which had already been carrying on propaganda in favour of Ripudaman Singh, exhibited a two-fold reaction: (i) stormy protest against the Government's interference in Nabha and (ii) further glorification of the Maharaja. These papers challenged the official version that the Maharaja had abdicated on his own and declared that the statements issued by the Government were false and deceptive.<sup>24</sup> *The Akali* dated 13 August 1923 wrote: 'The charges levelled against him are serious and it is necessary to rebut them, for silence will be taken to mean that they are well-founded.'<sup>25</sup> *The Nation* wrote that 'it possessed certain information of a most serious nature and the facts before it revealed that the statements made by the responsible authorities themselves show that the abdication of the Maharaja of Nabha was obtained as a result of a farcical display of charge-sheets which were meant to hoodwink the credulous'.<sup>26</sup>



British officials were charged with having insulted the Maharaja, the Senior Maharani Sahiba and her daughter, and having forcibly taken possession of the valuables in the palace.<sup>27</sup> The feelings of the Sikhs were stirred by quoting Minchin as having taunted the Maharaja with the query: 'Where is that Akali?' The official action in Nabha was described as a challenge to the Akali Movement.<sup>28</sup>

Leaders of the Indian National Congress, who otherwise held 'no briefs for the Maharaja', also eulogized him with the epithet of a 'nationalist prince' and argued that 'he was deposed not for his shortcomings but for his virtues'.<sup>29</sup>

With the Akali leadership's decision to take up the question of Ripudaman Singh's restoration to the throne of Nabha, the issue of his abdication assumed wider ramifications and the area of controversy expanded. In the beginning, opinions differed among the members of the S.G.P.C. with regard to their stand on the issue. The moderate members felt that the abdication was a 'political issue' and, as such, the S.G.P.C., which was a religious body, was not competent to take up the question of the Maharaja's restoration.<sup>30</sup> These members argued that if the Akali leadership felt that in deposing the Maharaja the Government had injured the feelings of the Sikh community, the question should then be taken up by the Sikh League, the political organisation of the Sikhs.<sup>31</sup> Most of the members of the S.G.P.C. were in favour of 'watching the developments and taking a moderate line of action'.<sup>32</sup>

Eventually, the propaganda of the native press, particularly through such pro-Nabha papers as *Akali*, *Akali-te-Pardesi* and some newspapers started or financed by Maharaja Ripudaman Singh such as *Sachha Dhandora*, *Daler-i-Hind*, *Bir Akali* and *Kirpan Bahadur*,<sup>33</sup> made a strong impact on the Sikhs. These papers argued that the Maharaja was deposed not because of the mal-administration in his State or his dispute with the Maharaja of Patiala, but because of his sympathy for and support to the Akali Movement.<sup>34</sup> 'The official action' these papers stated, 'was a side-attack on the Akali Movement'.<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, a militant group of the Akalis in the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Sikh League joined hands in exerting pressure on the S.G.P.C. to take speedy pro-Maharaja action. The Shiromani Akali Dal passed formal



resolutions urging the S.G.P.C. 'to raise a typhoon of agitation till the Maharaja was restored' and assured the leadership of the S.G.P.C. of its whole-hearted support in the struggle.<sup>36</sup>

A strong public opinion having been thus created, Master Tara Singh, an extremist Akali leader, did the spade-work for the Akali struggle for the restoration of the Maharaja of Nabha. Through a series of forceful articles in the two Akali dailies, *The Akali* and the *Akali-te-Pardesi* he made an effort to arouse Sikh sentiments by reviving the memory of the removal of Maharaja Duleep Singh from the Panjab thus drawing a parallel between the two events.<sup>37</sup> For example, in one of the issues of the *Akali-te-Pardesi* he wrote:

Lovers of the Panth, will you allow the guardians of Maharaja Duleep Singh to take charge of the Tikka Sahib of Nabha ? Rise, hold Diwans and deliver lectures. Every Sikh society should raise a storm of agitation against this treachery and deceit. . . .Do not stop, be fearless and come forward. . . .<sup>38</sup>

The Akali leadership formally took up the question of the restoration of the Maharaja by issuing a communique on 9 July 1923 stating: 'The hereditary ruler of Nabha was unjustly and forcibly detached from the administration of his state by the Government of India.'<sup>39</sup> The communique further charged the Government with 'arbitrary conduct and high-handedness towards the Maharaja'.<sup>40</sup> 29 July was fixed as a 'day of prayer' for the restoration of the Maharaja and 9 September 'the day for barefooted protest-march' in the principal streets of Delhi and important towns of the Panjab.<sup>41</sup> The sangat on such occasions was urged 'to pass resolutions condemning the action of the Government and the political agent and send messages of sympathy telegraphically to whatever place the Maharaja might have been removed'.<sup>42</sup> In another communique issued on 10 July 1923, it was stated that the S.G.P.C. had 'very good reasons to believe that the abdication of the Maharaja was not voluntary but had been exhorted by official pressure; that the weakening of the Nabha was the thin end of the wedge against an important section of



the Sikh community. . . .'<sup>43</sup> On 2 August 1923, the S.G.P.C. sent the following telegram to the Viceroy:

Shiromani Committee is in possession of unimpeachable documentary evidence to prove that intimidation and threats were used by Government officials to compel him to sign a pronouncement that his relinquishment was voluntary. Shiromani Committee on behalf of Sikh community asks Indian Government to submit to independent enquiry to satisfy Sikhs, failing that Sikh community will have right to believe that Indian Government admits above contention.<sup>44</sup>

The telegram was followed by 'a reminder. But evidently, the Government thought that if it were to acknowledge the S.G.P.C.'s telegram, it would be admitting the Akali leadership's right to take up the question of the Maharaja's restoration; it neither acknowledged this telegram nor refuted the Akali charge.<sup>45</sup>

Failing to get any assurance from the Government either of the restoration of the Maharaja in the near future or of the appointment of an independent enquiry Committee, the Akali leadership thought of getting the grievance redressed through non-violent agitation. At a meeting of the general body of the S.G.P.C., held on 4 August 1923, the Committee decided with a majority vote<sup>46</sup> that 'the Nabha question was one with which it is entitled to deal'.<sup>47</sup> On the following day, *i.e.*, 5 August, the Committee unanimously passed resolutions criticising the action of the Government and describing it as 'a side attack' on the Akali Movement; condemning treacherous officials of the Maharaja; and authorising its Executive Committee to get the wrong done to Nabha and the Panth righted by all peaceful and legitimate means.<sup>48</sup>

The officials in the province and the higher authorities at Delhi, who were watching the development with great concern, prepared themselves to meet the impending challenge from the Akalis. Even before the S.G.P.C. could formally pass the above resolution, the Viceroy of India had called a meeting of the rulers of the Sikh States, the Political Agent for the Phoolkian States, the British Administrator of Nabha and



other important officials of the Government of India and of the Panjab, to discuss joint measures and to co-ordinate the efforts of the Government of the Panjab and the rulers of the Sikh States in case of Akali agitation on the Nabha question. It was decided that 'the Akali Jathas should not be checked from leaving the British territories',<sup>49</sup> as it was thought that handling the Akali Jathas in the Sikh States would be easier. Apart from the use of Sikh troops to be supplied by the Sikh rulers, there was another advantage. Official action against the Jathas in the native States could also escape the attention of a large number of press reporters and other observers. The Conference assured the Administrator of Nabha that 'the Government would support him fully and sympathetically in any reasonable action he would pursue'.<sup>50</sup> It was also decided that '*firing would be considered legitimate in case of active resistance*'.<sup>51</sup>

On his return to Nabha, the Administrator<sup>52</sup> started making preparations to meet the impending challenge. The administration of Nabha armed itself by issuing certain ordinances prohibiting meetings within the State territory to discuss the Nabha issue.<sup>53</sup> It seems that the ordinances failed to discourage the Akalis in Nabha State who had described official action against the Maharaja as 'a blow to the Panthic orthodoxy, organisation and well-being'. In defiance of these orders, the Akalis continued to hold Diwans in different parts of Nabha State to discuss and condemn the official action.<sup>54</sup> One such Diwan was organised at Jaito on 25 August 1923. A huge procession was taken out on the first day of the Diwan. On the third day—27 August—certain resolutions were passed which, apart from expressing sympathy with the Maharaja, condemned the action of the State police, the traitorous State officials and the arrest of the Akalis in the neighbouring state of Patiala.<sup>55</sup> Under the orders of Gurdial Singh, the Assistant Administrator, the State police arrested the organisers—Inder Singh and other Akalis—on charges of delivering 'political speeches'.<sup>56</sup> The incident offered the Akalis a challenge and the Diwan, which was originally fixed for three days and was to disperse on 27 August, was extended indefinitely.<sup>57</sup>

So far the Akali Diwan at Jaito had been a local affair as no Akali had yet come from outside,<sup>58</sup> but the action of the Nabha administration drew the attention of the Akali leaders



from outside the State. To continue the Diwan and perhaps to attract visitors from outside, the organisers started an Akhand Path at Jaito. The Nabha police, in their bid to arrest the Akalis, including the one reading the holy Granth, is alleged to have disrupted the Akhand Path. The incident caused a great commotion among the Akalis who were already disturbed by the forced abdication of the Maharaja and the arrest of the organisers of the Diwan.<sup>59</sup>

On 29 September 1923, the S.G.P.C. passed a comprehensive resolution in five parts, condemning action in disrupting the Akhand Path and declaring its intention of restoring the Sikh right to free worship at all costs.

### **Akali Struggle at Jaito**

Jaito, a small town in Nabha State, thus became the scene of a virulent Akali morcha. The S.G.P.C. with a view to vindicating its right to free-worship and to getting the Maharaja restored, decided to send daily Jathas to Jaito from the Akal Takhat at Amritsar. To begin with, Jathas of 25 members each daily walked to Jaito after taking a pledge of non-violence, in thought, word and deed, before the Akal Takhat, with the following aims:

- (a) to resume the interrupted Akhand Path at Gangsar, Jaito; and
- (b) to suffer, in meek and humble spirit, all hardships and tortures inflicted by the proud officials, for the sake of establishing the Sikh birth-right for free congregation and worship in all Sikh Gurdwaras.<sup>60</sup>

The British officials in the province, who were watching with great concern the growing power and prestige of the Akali leadership, noticed that this was adding to the success of the S.G.P.C.'s appeal in impressing upon the non-Akali Sikhs that this was a purely religious programme.<sup>61</sup> The officials were particularly worried that the journey of the Akali Jathas to Jaito would be 'of the nature of a triumphal procession',<sup>62</sup> which would add further to the Akali prestige. Higher officials suggested that timely action would not only check the Akali activities but would also restore the prestige of the



bureaucracy.<sup>63</sup> To those British officials in the province, who were waiting for 'sufficient evidence' to implement the Secretary of State's advice 'to put an effective stop to the Akali operations by the arrest and prosecution of all the organisers (of the Akali Movement) as abettors',<sup>64</sup> the Akali Jathas' march to Nabha provided a good opportunity to declare the Shiromani Akali Dal, the S.G.P.C. and other allied organisations 'unlawful associations'.<sup>65</sup>

The decision to send Jathas to Jaito was described as 'openly encouraging bodies of Akalis to invade the Nabha State with the object of intimidating the Government and to interfere with the maintenance of law and order'.<sup>66</sup> By an order dated 12 October 1923, the Government of the Panjab declared the S.G.P.C., and all Jathas organised by or affiliated to it, 'unlawful associations' as they constituted 'a danger to the public peace'.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, all the 60 members of the Interim Committee of the S.G.P.C. were arrested and charged with 'treason against the King-Emperor'.<sup>68</sup> The order and the subsequent official action failed to achieve the desired object. They could not 'put an effective stop to the Akali activity'. Jathas continued to pour into Jaito from all parts of the Panjab. As planned earlier at the official meeting held in Delhi on 25 July, these Jathas were not checked in the British territories. However, as soon as they reached the boundaries of the Nabha State, they were arrested and beaten mercilessly. But the members of the Jathas, as Jawaharlal Nehru testified, gave an 'amazing exhibition of courage and endurance...and never retreated a step, nor did they raise their hands against the police. . . .'<sup>69</sup> After being kept in custody for a few days, they were sent to the neighbouring areas of Babalkanti in Rajasthan or to Rewari, some 500 kilometers away from Nabha. Here they were left 'in penniles condition to shift for themselves as best as they could'.<sup>70</sup> According to a contemporary, 'within a period of seven months this happened with no less than 5,000 Akali pilgrims'.<sup>71</sup>

However, the march of the smaller Jathas of 25 member to Jaito and their arrest by the Nabha State authorities did not yield any tangible results. In order to intensify the agitation, the S.G.P.C. decided that a bigger Shahidi Jatha of 500 Akalis should reach Jaito on 21 February 1924 to coincide with the



third anniversary of the Nankana tragedy.<sup>72</sup> After making preliminary arrangements, the S.G.P.C. decided to despatch the Jatha on 9 February 1924. Before its departure, the Jatha, which comprised men from different professions and classes from various parts of the Panjab, was exhorted by the Jathedar of Akal Takhat 'to remain perfectly non-violent in thought, word and deed'.<sup>73</sup> According to the report of the Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, 'the members of the Jatha were not regular hangers-on of the Durbar Sahib but included genuine fanatics'.<sup>74</sup> Later, Dr. Saifud-Din Kitchlew, Pandit Dina Nath and some other members of the Congress Party also joined the Jatha. According to official reports, about 30,000 people witnessed the Jatha set out from the Clock Tower at Amritsar.<sup>75</sup>

On its march, the members of the Jatha were welcomed by the villages they passed through. When the Jatha entered the Malwa territory, in the Sikh State of Patiala, the locals undaunted by the Shahi Farmans of their ruler, Bhupinder Singh, welcomed it. In an address presented to the Jatha the Malwa Sikhs assured the Akali leadership that 'if this place (Jaito) is made the second Nankana Sahib we take the vow that, in obedience to the orders of the Guru Panth and subject to non-violence, each and every one of us will shed his blood at the place where your sweat falls, we are at all times ready to serve you. . .'.<sup>76</sup>

After marching through different villages and evoking spirited response from the Sikh peasantry of Malwa on 20 February, the Jatha enthusiastically reached Bargari, a village on the border of Nabha and Faridkot about fifteen kilometers from Jaito. The Jatha left for its destination—the Gurdwara of Gangsar at Jaito—on 21 February about mid-day. Here Mr. Zimand, *New York Times* correspondent, also joined them. According to many independent observers including Mr. Zimand: 'the Jatha was moving in perfect order and non-violence with large crowds of public on its right and left, five *Nishan Sahibs* in the front and *Guru Granth* in the middle'.<sup>77</sup>

When the Jatha reached a distance of about 150 meters from the Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib, Mr. Wilson-Johnston, the Administrator of Nabha, arrived and ordered it to stop.<sup>78</sup> But the Jatha which had taken a vow before the Akal Takhat to



resume the interrupted Akhand Path, come what may, and was determined not to return without achieving their goal, continued to march in the direction of Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib. Mr. Wilson Johnston, gave the signal to open fire.<sup>79</sup>

According to Mr. Zimand:

It was at 2.25 p.m. that the firing started. The firing was in regular volleys and there were no desultory shots. The first round of firing lasted for full two minutes, *i.e.*, from 2.45 to 2.47 p.m. The second round of firing started at 2.55 and it lasted for full three minutes.<sup>80</sup>

The members of Jatha, who from the very beginning knew the risk involved in their march to Jaito and were prepared to attain martyrdom, were not deterred by the volleys of bullets and continued their onward march.<sup>81</sup> Many of them fell dead or wounded; but carrying them the rest of the Jatha moved directly to Tibbi Sahib.

According to Mr. Zimand, the dead and the wounded were not attended to by the State authorities.<sup>82</sup> This is confirmed by Dr. Kitchlew and Principal Gidwani who visited the place to take care of the dead and the wounded.<sup>83</sup> According to the S.G.P.C. communiques, and the reports in the native press, 'the Akalis were prevented by the army men from removing the dead and the wounded and thus many of the wounded died for lack of attendance and water'.<sup>84</sup> According to some eyewitnesses, 'the dead and wounded amongst the sangat were seen scattered in the corn-fields. Medical staff travelling with the Jatha and the store of medicine, etc., were seized by the Nabha Administration. . . .'<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Dr. Kehar Singh, in charge of the medical arrangement of the Jathas, was also arrested.<sup>86</sup>

Opinions differ regarding the number of casualties. According to the S.G.P.C., 'the exact number of the dead and wounded could not be ascertained as the scene of the tragedy was made inaccessible to independent observers and press reporters. . . .'<sup>87</sup> Pro-Akali newspapers put the number of the dead and wounded at over 500, while the S.G.P.C. communique reported that there were over 300 casualties, including 70 to 150 dead.<sup>88</sup> Official reports and the report of



the Judicial Magistrate who conducted an enquiry into the incident, put the number at 19 dead and 28 wounded.<sup>89</sup>

The native press reacted by applauding the Jatha for their sacrifices and by severely condemning the Administrator and the Government of India for their ruthless barbarity and for enacting another Jallianwala spectacle. *The Onward* wrote: 'General Dyer is reborn and re-incarnated in the person of the Administrator of Nabha'.<sup>90</sup> *The Loyal* drew a comparison between the incident at Jaito and the earlier tragedy at Nankana and wrote that while the latter was the work of a 'selfish and tyrannical Mahant', the former was that of a 'civilized Government headed by a European officer, with high professions about justice and law and order'.<sup>91</sup> *Akali-te-Pradesi* and other pro-Akali papers held the Government of India responsible for the incident and demanded the appointment of a committee to enquire into the facts.<sup>92</sup> *Kesri* held the view: 'Nabha officials had pre-arranged a sinister and terrible plan and wanted to conceal their criminal and murderous designs from eyewitnesses'.<sup>93</sup> Scathing in its denunciation, the editor of *Bharat* declared: 'It appears that owing to successive defeats in the Legislative Assembly, the Government of India have become mentally deranged, otherwise they would not have given such a foolish advice to Nabha authorities'.<sup>94</sup> The press refuted and ridiculed the Government of India's plea that it had no hand in the firing at Jaito and that since Nabha was outside the jurisdiction of the British, they could not interfere in its internal affairs. For example, *Bande Matram* asked 'whether those killed at Jaito were not subjects of British India and whether or not the Indian States are under the Government of India and whether or not the latter will interfere if the Indian States are invaded'. The paper further stated: '... if the Administrator can go to Delhi to confer with the Government of India, how is one to believe that the Nabha Durbar is doing everything on its own, without the Government of India having a hand in the affair'.<sup>95</sup>

Important leaders of the Indian National Congress who were watching with keen interest the Akali involvement in the Nabha affair and had, in fact, formally expressed sympathy with the Maharaja and the Akalis, condemned the official action. Public meetings were held at Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay,



Madras and Karachi which were addressed by such popular national leaders as Mohammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, C.R. Dass, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Malaviya and others.<sup>96</sup> Mahatma Gandhi and Lala Lajpat Rai also expressed their sympathy with the Akali cause.<sup>97</sup>

In a resolution passed on 31 December 1923, the Congress described the official action against the Akali leadership as 'a direct challenge to the right of free association of all Indians' and appealed to the nation to stand by the Sikhs.<sup>98</sup> The Khilafat Committee and the Muslim League also expressed their sympathies with the Akalis. Nationalist Members in the Central Assembly and the Panjab Legislative Council also condemned the Jaito firing.

In order partially to appease public opinion, the Government of India advised the Nabha authorities to conduct an enquiry into the Jaito firing which a subordinate Magistrate of Nabha was ordered to conduct.<sup>99</sup> In his lengthy report, the Magistrate exonerated the State officials and held the members of the Jatha and the crowd following it, guilty of 'using fire-arms'. Justifying the firing at the Jatha, he wrote that 'the firing was first started by an unknown Akali' and that the Nabha authorities had, under the circumstances, 'no option but to open fire. . . .'<sup>100</sup>

This charge however, seems to be an invention of the executive machinery in connivance with the Judicial Magistrate. It is contradicted by the evidence of such eyewitnesses and observers as S. Zimand, Dr. Kitchlew and Principal Gidwani. Writing to Mahatma Gandhi about the official charge that 'the Jatha was armed with lathis, chhavis, spears and fire-arms', S. Zimand wrote:

I want, therefore, to repeat again that *I observed carefully the Jatha and the crowds* following the Jatha from February 20th, 7 p.m. till February 21st, 2 p.m. when they entered Nabha territory and that to the best of my knowledge *the Jatha and the crowd* following the Jatha were not armed; and behaved in a peaceful and orderly manner.<sup>101</sup>

In the statement given to the Congress, Akali Sahayak Bureau, which prepared its own report about the Jaito firing, Dr.



Kitchlew said, 'we have absolutely satisfied ourselves that the Jatha and the sangat had no fire-arms or chhavis (except Kirpan) or any other instruments other than ordinary lathis'.<sup>102</sup>

While the demand for an independent enquiry into the Jaito firing was going on, the Akali leadership continued sending more Jathas to Jaito even though some national leaders advised them to suspend their movement in order to take fresh stock of the situation and also to give time to the Government to think over the problem. It is interesting here to note that Mahatma Gandhi, who was mainly responsible for the Akalis shifting from purely religious agitation to passive resistance against the Government and was a source of inspiration to the Akalis, also advised them to suspend their movement and to stop sending more Jathas to Jaito. In his letter dated 4 March 1924 to the Secretary of S.G.P.C., the Mahatma advised the Akalis to think over the whole question afresh. Further he informed them that he would be able to help them only if the Akalis could separate their agitation in Nabha, which in his opinion was a purely political question, from their movement of religious reform. Here the Mahatma seems to have neglected the fact that it was he and his lieutenants in the Sikh League who brought the Akalis from religion to politics and persuaded them to formally join the movement of non-cooperation by launching a frontal attack against the bureaucracy which was backing the vested interests in the Sikh shrines. During his visit to Nankana soon after the tragedy he not only expressed sympathy with the Akalis but also advised them to offer non-cooperation to the Government in the matter of the official enquiry into the tragedy and agreed to serve as the President of the non-official enquiry committee in case the Akalis agreed to adopt a formal resolution of non-cooperation. In a long speech (in Hindustani) he called upon the Akalis to broaden the scope of their movement for the liberation of the Sikh shrines by joining the larger movement for the liberation of the country. Later, when the Akalis delivered moral defeat to the powerful bureaucracy in the Panjab over the 'Keys Affair', the Mahatma sent a congratulatory telegram to Baba Kharak Singh, President of the S.G.P.C., and hailed the Akali victory as 'the first



victory of the forces of nationalism in the country'. At that stage when the Akalis were engaged in a life and death struggle at Jaito, the Mahatma's advice to immediately suspend the movement and to drop the Nabha issue altogether was bound to further weaken the Akali Movement. When the Akali leaders expressed their inability to accept his advice and continued sending more Jathas to Jaito, the Mahatma started issuing open letters expressing his doubts about the Akalis' adherence to the principle of non-violence. The Mahatma's reference to the alleged demolition of the Hindu temples by the Sikh reformers and to the past incidents of the removal of Hindu idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple were bound to weaken the communal harmony brought about by the Akali Movement by enlisting the sympathy and support of the Hindu and Sikh masses to the Akali cause. In his letters to the Akalis the Mahatma wanted them to give him an assurance that their movement was 'neither anti-Hindu nor anti-any other race or creed'. The Mahatma seems to have also been influenced by the official propaganda that the Akalis were working for the 'restoration of the Sikh Raj under the cloak of religious reform' when he asked them to declare that 'the S.G.P.C. has no desire for the establishment of the Sikh Raj'. In spite of the Akalis giving a clear demonstration of their strict adherence to the principle of passive sufferings at Nankana, Guru-ka-Bagh, Jaito and other places and a number of independent observers including the Congress leaders testifying to this; and of the S.G.P.C. formally condemning violent activities, confirming their belief in non-violence and categorically stating that 'their movement was neither anti-Hindu nor anti-any other creed' with no desire of establishing Sikh Raj, the Mahatma showed himself unable to form a correct assessment of the Akalis and their movement and suddenly withdrew his support to their cause at a very critical juncture. Whether this shift in the Mahatma's stand was due to his fears about the Akalis becoming violent and Jaito repeating the history of Chauri Chaura or in keeping with his policy of suspending the movements when they grew too strong and went beyond the control of his trusted lieutenants is a question which needs further investigation.<sup>103</sup>



After the sudden withdrawal of moral support by Mahatma Gandhi, a number of other factors added further to the difficulties of the Akali leadership. Opening of fresh front at Bhai Pheru, in Lahore District, while the Jaito morcha was still on, put additional strain on the Akali resources. Malcolm Hailey, the new Governor of Panjab, tried to weaken the movement by his new policy of isolating the Akalis from the nationalist leadership and by creating divisions in their ranks. In order to divert the energies and resources of the Akalis and thereby weaken their movement, he urged the judicial machinery in the State to appoint a Receiver for Nankana Sahib and to terminate the lease of land at Guru-ka-Bagh given to Sir Ganga Ram. At the same time, he encouraged the officially sponsored anti-Akali associations to produce drafts of the Gurdwara Bill and to take the initiative in the matter of the Akhand Path at Jaito and thus to take wind out of the Akali sails.<sup>104</sup>

The Government of the Panjab was also growing tired of the increasing number of Akali prisoners resulting from the Akali leadership's decision not to suspend Jathas marching to Jaito. Apart from the practical difficulties of accommodating the increasing number of Akali prisoners, there were equally important political considerations which compelled the Panjab Government to find a solution to the Jaito problem. Official action at Jaito and the arrest and detention of a large number of British subjects in the Nabha State without proper trials provided the nationalist Members of the Indian Legislative Assembly and other critics of the Government with a chance to lambaste the official policy.<sup>105</sup> The Panjab Government's failure to find a solution to the Akali problem and to get an agreed Bill passed for the purpose, strengthened the efforts of M.A. Jinnah and Madan Mohan Malaviya to introduce a Gurdwara Bill in the Central Legislative Assembly.<sup>106</sup>

It was under these circumstances that the Akali leadership and the British officials renewed their efforts for a solution to the Jaito problem. While the Government was now prepared to enter into negotiations with the Akali leadership through Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Bhai Jodh Singh, the main stumbling block was the Akali stand with regard to the Maharaja of Nabha. Though the Government was willing to



allow the Akalis to complete the interrupted Akhand Path on certain conditions, it insisted that the Akali leadership must altogether drop the question of the restoration of the Maharaja.<sup>107</sup> This the Akali leadership was not prepared to do at that stage. Another difficulty was the time needed to complete the Akhand Path at Jaito and the number of persons who could be allowed to enter the precincts of the Gurdwara for this purpose. While the Administrator was willing to allow a maximum number of 1,000 persons to enter Nabha, he felt that the long period of ten months that was needed to complete 101 Akhand Paths could not be allowed on political grounds.<sup>108</sup>

While the Nabha authorities and the Akali leadership were busy negotiating over the various issues, the passage, in the meantime, of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bills, automatically settled the Jaito and other issues. With regard to the Nabha Affair, Malcolm Hailey, the Governor of the Panjab, made the following declaration:

The Administrator of Nabha will permit bands of pilgrims to proceed for religious worship to the Gangsar Gurdwara under the following rules:

- (a) That they abstain from holding political Diwans or spreading political propaganda during their sojourn within the state boundaries;
- (b) that they confine themselves to the use of the Gurdwara itself and such reasonable space around it as may be set apart for their accommodation;
- (c) that they will be self-supporting during their visit, the village and *Mandi* of Jaito being excluded from the area set apart for their accommodation;
- (d) that any such band will arrive at Jaito by rail or by a road decided upon by the Administrator and that suitable arrangements shall have been made to ensure that any such band of pilgrims will be unaccompanied by any sangat or following;
- (e) and that the date of arrival of any such band at Jaito is communicated to the Administrator in order to enable him to make suitable arrangements in connection with the same. . . .<sup>109</sup>



After the passage of the Bill, Bhai Jodh Singh, Sardar Narain Singh and other Sikh Members of the Legislative Council met the Akali leaders in jail and obtained their approval of the Bill and stopping of Jathas to Bhai Pheru and Jaito. Bhai Jodh Singh arranged with Mr. Wilson Johnston, the Administrator of Nabha, for the completion of the Akhand Paths at Jaito. The first Jatha, consisting among others the Udasi and Nirmala Sadhus, left Akal Takhat under the leadership of Bhai Jodh Singh and arrived at Jaito on 21 July, 1925.<sup>110</sup> Another Jatha arrived from Delhi the same day. On 27 July 1925, more Jathas reached Jaito after being released from the Nabha Beers and other jails. The deadlock finally ended with the Akalis completing their 101 Akhand Paths on 6 August 1925.<sup>111</sup>

While the passage of the Bill helped to settle the question of the resumption of the disrupted Path, the main issue, *i.e.*, the restoration of the Maharaja still remained unsettled. When the Akali leadership approached Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders for guidance and help in the Nabha Affair, the Mahatma replied that he could interest himself in the Jaito morcha only if the Akalis separated the political question regarding the restoration of the Maharaja from the religious question for the restoration of the Akhand Path. He also demanded a written statement from the Maharaja stating that 'all the writings were practically extorted from him' and that he was prepared to face all the consequences resulting from an agitation for his restoration.<sup>112</sup> In the event of the desired statement being given to him, the Mahatma promised to launch a powerful all-India agitation for the restoration of the Maharaja in which 'the Akalis were merely to assist in the elucidation of facts'.<sup>114</sup>

In view of Mahatma Gandhi's advice, the Working Committee of the S.G.P.C. sent a deputation<sup>114</sup> to Dehra Dun to meet the Maharaja and to obtain the required statement. From the report of Raja Singh, the leader of the deputation, one learns that the Maharaja first tried to avoid the S.G.P.C. representatives and 'concealed himself in the bathroom'.<sup>115</sup> When with great efforts, the deputation managed to secure an interview with the Maharaja and requested him for a written statement stating that his abdication was not voluntary and



asked for a copy of his representation to the Viceroy, the Maharaja first tried to put them off with excuses and finally said, 'No'.<sup>116</sup> When Raja Singh argued that it was difficult for the S.G.P.C. to proceed further without at least one of the two documents, the Maharaja initially complained of having been badly treated by the Akalis and then said: 'Then why not leave the Nabha question'.<sup>117</sup>

Malcolm Hailey in a letter dated 3 March 1924 to Sir Edward Maclagan, drew attention to the danger arising from the general demand for some form of enquiry. This demand, he pointed out, had been made by national leaders and some Members of the Legislative Assembly, many of whom had seen the confidential documents relating to the Maharaja's abdication and were convinced that he had been forced to abdicate.<sup>118</sup>

The refusal of the Maharaja to give the required statement to the S.G.P.C. and his public dissociation with the Akalis and their agitation further weakened the position of those Akali leaders who still wanted to carry on the struggle for his restoration. Whatever might have been the facts of his case, the Maharaja had at that stage, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi: 'made it practically impossible for his well-wishers to carry on an effective agitation for his restoration'.<sup>119</sup>

However, it is interesting to note that when in July 1925 the Maharaja learnt that the majority of the Akali leaders in the Lahore Fort Jail were prepared to give an undertaking to the Government to work for the Gurdwara Bill and to drop the Nabha question<sup>120</sup> to get the Bill passed, he made a forceful appeal to the Akalis not to accept the Bill. In a long note in chaste Urdu (in Gurmukhi script) written at the time of the passage of the Bill, the Maharaja accused the Akalis of being 'treacherous and unfaithful' to him like his earlier advisers. He exhorted the Akali leadership not to give up the issue of his restoration as, in his words:

The result of the Akalis dropping the Nabha issue would be that the officials after some time, finding a suitable opportunity would crush me to pieces, would take me to Burma or somewhere else to intern me for the remaining



part of my life and kill me and my family with all types of tortures. . . .<sup>121</sup>

The Maharaja was for once to prove partly right for soon after the passage of the Bill and the dropping of the Nabha question by the Akali leadership, he was suddenly removed from Dehra Dun to far-off Kodai Kanai in the South to spend the remaining part of his life in virtual exile till his death on 14 December 1942.

### **Patiala and other Sikh States' Measures against the Akali Movement**

Of all the Sikh princes who offered their co-operation and loyal services to the British Government in combating 'the dangerous Sikh Movement', Bhupinder Singh of Patiala played the most conspicuous role. He was the most influential Sikh prince, ruling the biggest Phoolkian State with an area of over 5412 sq. miles.<sup>122</sup> While in his own State he was notorious for his autocratic ways, oppressive administration, personal debauchery and the suppression of popular political aspirations,<sup>123</sup> with the British officials he wielded remarkable influence. Because of his staunch support, loyalty and co-operation, the British officials heaped a spate of titles on him.<sup>124</sup> As an ultra-loyalist Bhupinder Singh came out in open support of the Government during Akali agitation of the twenties. He also organised anti-Akali propaganda machinery with the help of the landlords, *Zaildars*, *Suphedposhes*, military pensioners and other loyalists and vested interests in the Panjab.<sup>125</sup>

Apart from his anxiety to please his British patrons, the fact that the S.G.P.C. and other nationalist forces were supporting the cause of his political rival, Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, made him particularly enthusiastic in his anti-Akali campaign. Even before the British authorities could approach him for help, he visited Delhi to meet the Viceroy. In the course of his meeting, he advised Lord Reading to influence the moderates among the Akali leadership so as to separate the issue of the Gurdwara reform from the political propaganda of the Akali leadership. While emphasising his loyalty to the Crown, he warned the authorities against the



recalcitrant attitude and independent nature of the Maharaja of Nabha.

Bhupinder Singh came out in open support of the authorities by lending the services of his troops, C.I.D. and civil officials, and by organising counter propaganda to combat the Akali agitation over the forced abdication of Ripudaman Singh. The history of his secret services to the Paramount Power in suppressing popular movements in his State was already quite lengthy. During the Ghadr activities in 1914, Bhupinder Singh helped the Government considerably by 'arresting some of the dangerous America-returned emigrants. . . and interning such of them as were residing in Patiala State'.<sup>126</sup> Again, during the days of Martial Law in the Panjab, Patiala rendered assistance to the Government in the form of 'protecting communications, guarding railway lines, and in co-operation with the Panjab C.I.D. in arresting S.S. Caveeshar and Master Mota Singh—two Sikh extremists'.<sup>127</sup>

Right from the inception of the Akali Movement until its finale, and even afterwards, the Maharaja did his best to ease the situation for the British officials and to win over the loyalists. When, in the early twenties, discontent over the official control of the management of the Golden Temple and other important Sikh shrines was brewing, the Maharaja 'used influence with the Sikh community in bringing about a settlement of the question of the control of the Gurdwaras'.<sup>128</sup> The Maharaja exerted himself under the advice and with the approval of the British authorities. In consultation with the Governor of the Panjab, he proposed a Gurdwara Managing Committee of 36 members, mainly loyalists. However, the extremists did not accept the proposal and formed a bigger and more representative committee of their own choice.<sup>129</sup> Thus, the first attempt of the Maharaja of Patiala to please the authorities and to ensure indirect official control over the Sikh shrines was not successful. Although he again offered his services 'to set the matter right', the authorities seem to have realised by that time that in the face of popular opposition, the Maharaja's manoeuvres were of little avail. His offer was, therefore, declined.<sup>130</sup>

However, neither the opposition from the Sikh masses nor



the non-acceptance of his 'offer of loyal services' by the British Government could discourage the Maharaja. Prior to the Nankana tragedy the Maharaja had made an unsuccessful attempt to bring about some sort of settlement between Mahant Narain Das and the Akali leadership.<sup>131</sup> He also furnished the Panjab Government with a note containing his views on the question of the control of Gurdwaras and explained to Sir Edward Maclagan his solution to the problem. After the Nankana tragedy, when the Panjab Government had adopted a 'strong policy towards the Akali movement', the Maharaja proclaimed his open support for the official measures of suppression.<sup>132</sup>

During the Akali agitation over the 'Keys' Affair he offered his help and cooperation to the Government.<sup>133</sup> The Prime Minister of Patiala State and the Political Agent to the Governor-General had a meeting with the Governor of the Panjab and suggested to him various measures to tackle the Akali agitation.<sup>134</sup> But the Panjab Government did not pay much attention to the suggestions of Patiala State and handed over the keys to Sardar Kharak Singh, President of the S.G.P.C.

After having failed to crush the Akali agitation by force, the Government decided to create dissension in the Akali camp. For this purpose, the services of the Maharaja were fully utilised in organising anti-Akali propaganda. Editors and printers of newspapers were paid handsome allowances by Patiala State to carry on effective propaganda against the Akali Movement. The Maharaja also helped the Government in the formation of the Sikh Sudhar and Zila Committees composed of loyalists, Government pensioners, and other vested interests to boost anti-Akali feeling in the rural areas. Through these organisations, the Maharaja tried to dissuade prospective volunteers from the rural areas from joining the Akali ranks. The Maharaja was also used by the authorities to influence the moderates in the Akali leadership to separate the religious reform movement from the political agitation. The Patiala plan in this connection was 'to secure the majority of such members in the S.G.P.C. as would prefer to do purely religious work without opposing the Government'.<sup>135</sup>

The Maharaja issued special proclamations barring the



State subjects from enlisting in Akali Jathas or collecting funds for the movement and authorising the State police to take strong action against those sympathising with the Akali reformers. He organised a parallel Gurdwara Committee with adequate staff and liberal financial backing to prevent the Gurdwaras in his State from passing into Akali control.

In December 1921, when the Akali Movement was at its zenith and the Akalis had planned to take control of the Gurdwara at Fatehgarh Sahib (in Patiala State), 'the Maharaja paid a personal visit at the time of the *Shahidi Jormela* and checkmated the efforts of the extremist Akalis'.<sup>136</sup>

In the matter of the arrests of extremists like Master Mota Singh and Bijla Singh, Patiala State rendered positive help to the Panjab C.I.D. Both these extremists were persuaded by Patiala State to surrender themselves, were paid liberal allowances, and were then used to weaken the Akali Movement.<sup>137</sup> It was with the help of Master Mota Singh and Bijla Singh that Babu Sant Singh and Ram Singh, two amongst the most important members of the Babbar Akali group, were arrested by the Panjab police. The Patiala officials claimed that 'the State informers passed most accurate and timely information to the Panjab C.I.D. and did the direct work in the imperial interests in rounding up the Babbar terrorists'.<sup>138</sup>

However, the most important role that Patiala played against the Akali Movement was during the agitation over the abdication of the Maharaja of Nabha and the resultant Akali struggle at Jaito. The Maharaja actively participated in the special conference convened by the Government of India on 25 July 1923 to coordinate the efforts of the Panjab Government and the Sikh States.

After the conference, the Maharaja and his Prime Minister returned to Patiala and augmented the existing police and administrative resources to meet the situation resulting from the march of the Akali Jathas to Jaito. Additional police and military forces were recruited, the Patiala C.I.D. was overhauled and provided with the latest equipment and training and changes were effected in the personnel of the Department. A Shahi Farman was issued in August 1923 which forbade all seditious activities against the Patiala Raj and the British Government. Armed with the Farman, the State police



arrested all important persons suspected of having delivered inflammatory and seditious speeches at Diwans in various parts of the State. They were convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, fines and confiscation of property.

However, this policy of repression did not succeed fully. Sardar Sewa Singh Thikriwala,<sup>139</sup> who was a mainspring of the Akali struggle in the Sikh States, renewed his activities with added enthusiasm. He organised a huge Diwan in his village at Thikriwala at which the Maharaja was condemned for his alliance with the British authorities in suppressing the Akali Movement. Bhupinder Singh ordered his police to proceed immediately to Thikriwala and put a stop to the activities of Sewa Singh and others. The Patiala police clamped Section 144 on the village and arrested the organisers of the Diwan who were planning to take out a procession to the adjoining villages to protest against the activities of the Maharaja.<sup>140</sup> As a reaction to the police action, the villagers of Thikriwala staged a dharna in front of the Tehsil office at Barnala. According to an eyewitness, the villagers left the place only after being given a firm assurance by the Superintendent of Police and the Nazim that the people arrested in connection with the Akali activities would be released before dusk of the following day.<sup>141</sup> The arrested leaders were released by the State authorities next morning, and were taken in procession from the city of Barnala to the Akali headquarters at Thikriwala.<sup>142</sup> Actually the activities of the Akalis emboldened the peasantry of the State and created an awakening among them. The threats of the police officials and the Shahi Farmans of the Maharaja could no longer check them from expressing their resentment against British imperialism and its supporters—the Sikh Princes.<sup>143</sup> Undaunted by the Maharaja's threats, Sewa Singh Thikriwala further broadened the scope of Akali activities in Patiala State by starting a Punjabi daily, *The Kaumi Dard*, to counteract the State propaganda. Like its counterparts in the Panjab, Sewa Singh's paper greatly helped the movement in the Sikh States by strengthening the Akali ideology to the peasantry and thereby strengthening the Akali organisation.<sup>144</sup>

During the struggle at Jaito while the authorities in the Panjab tried to curb the growing Akali activities by declaring



the S.G.P.C., the Shiromani Akali Dal and allied organisations 'unlawful associations', Patiala State took collateral measures against the Akalis in its jurisdiction. A fresh notification was issued by the Home Minister of Patiala, 'prohibiting the Patiala subjects from associating with the Shahidi Jathas at Jaito...'.<sup>145</sup> Sewa Singh Thikriwala was again arrested along with other Akalis in the State and held in the Karkhas Jail at Patiala. Here he was subjected to all types of threats, intimidation and allurements to dissociate himself from the Akali leadership. According to a contemporary: 'the Maharaja promised Sewa Singh that he would hand over the control of all the Gurdwaras in Patiala State to him if he agreed to sever his connections with the Akali leadership'. On Sewa Singh's refusal, the Maharaja ordered him to be sent to the Lahore Fort Jail along with other important Akali leaders.<sup>146</sup>

While the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill was being discussed in the Panjab Legislative Council, the Maharaja tried to weaken the authority of the Akali leadership as he feared that after securing official recognition of their control over various Sikh shrines, the reformers might direct all their energies against him for his opposition to their movement. In his letter to the Governor of the Panjab, he expressed his fear of a reflex action prejudicial to his State and opposed the official recognition of the S.G.P.C. or the creation of a strong Central Board as provided in the Bill.<sup>147</sup> When he failed to persuade the authorities to exclude the Central Board from the provisions of the Bill and the Government gave statutory recognition to the S.G.P.C., the Maharaja begged for adequate representation in the Central Board. In this connection, it is interesting to note that while the Maharaja wanted 'adequate representation' on the Central Board, he did not want all the provisions of the elected management to be applied to the Gurdwaras in his own State. The Government, however, could promise no concession to the Maharaja in the face of vocal public opinion against him.

Bhupinder Singh, ruler of the princely state of Patiala, carried great influence with the rulers of other princely states in India. Through his tact and diplomacy he managed to build a good rapport with the successive Viceroys and other higher echelons of the British rule. He also managed to get



himself elected as the Chancellor of the Chamber of Indian Princes. With such contacts he naturally carried much weight and used his position to weaken popular forces in his own state and also in other princely states. The Akali movement being over Bhupinder Singh busied himself in checking the activities of the Praja Mandal, a party which took upon itself the onerous responsibility of liberating these tiny islands of despotism from the doubly oppressive rule of Indian provinces. Bhupinder Singh got Sewa Singh Thikriwala, leader of the Praja Mandal Movement, arrested and threw him in the jail. Sewa Singh languished in a solitary cell till his death in 1935. However, things took a turn for the better after the death of Bhupinder Singh. His son, Yadavindra Singh, who succeeded him as the ruler of Patiala State, was known for his sympathies with the Akali and other popular leaders. Instead of following the policy of oppression like his father he followed a policy of compromise. Through his tactful handling of the Akalis he not only succeeded in containing popular agitations but also emerged as a popular and most acceptable leader of the masses both in his own state and outside. Because of his generous help in the rehabilitation of the refugees after the partition of India and because of decisive role in persuading the princely states to join the Indian Union Yadavindra Singh became equally popular with his subjects in the State and Pandit Nehru and other national leaders who became the new rulers of independent India. That is why when princely states of East Panjab were merged to form the new state of PEPSU Yadavindra Singh was made the *Rajpramukh* (Head of state) of the newly formed state. He held this position till the merger of PEPSU with Panjab in 1956. Even after the merger of PEPSU and the Maharaja being deprived of the pivotal position of Rajpramukh and later even the privy purse and other privileges, Yadavindra Singh maintained cordial relations both with the Centre and the newly organised state of Panjab. This is why on many crucial occasions, especially when Master Tara Singh had gone on a fast unto death for the creation of a Panjabi Suba, his influence and good offices were used in bringing about a rapprochement between the Centre and the Akali leaders in Panjab. Yadavindra Singh's son, Amarinder Singh continued the tradition of friendship



with the Central leaders and was even elected to the Parliament on Congress ticket till he parted company with the Congress on the sensitive issue of Operation Blue Star in 1984. Later he was elected to the Panjab Assembly on the Akali ticket and was made the state's Minister for Agriculture till he resigned from the Cabinet over the issue of police entry into the Golden Temple on April 30, 1986. Paradoxical as it may sound the areas which formed these erstwhile princely states and which played a major role in suppressing the Akali movement have now become the major source of sustenance of the Akali politics. Almost all prominent Akali leaders like Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, Parkash Singh Badal, Surjit Singh Barnala, Gurcharan Singh Tohra and 'Maharaja' Amarinder Singh, hail from this area of Panjab.



## SHIROMANI GURDWARA PRABANDHAK COMMITTEE : ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Since its inception in 1920 the S.G.P.C. has been wielding tremendous power and influence in the Sikh religious affairs. Called a 'mini-parliament of the Sikhs' with 160 members and an annual budget of nearly 12 crore of rupees, the S.G.P.C. provides a unique model of management of religious places wherein the Sikhs democratically elect their supreme body to look after the management of the historic Sikh shrines. The S.G.P.C. came into existence during the Gurdwara reform movement (1920-25) to look after the Shrines which came under the control of the Akali reformers. It was on November 15, 1920, that the Akali leaders summoned a general assembly of Sikhs of all shades of opinion in front of the Akal Takhat for the purpose of electing a representative Committee to control the Golden Temple, the Akal Takhat and other Gurdwaras which were coming under the control of the Akali reformers.<sup>1</sup>

This move of the Akali leadership seems to have alarmed the authorities in the Panjab who felt that such a body would 'surrender to the advocates of ultra-Sikhism'.<sup>2</sup> The Government of the Panjab, which was already in touch with the Viceroy of India and Members of his Council seeking guidelines regarding a future line of action, decided to forestall the proposed gathering and announced provisional Advisory Committee of its own after consulting Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.<sup>3</sup> This committee, which was composed chiefly



of persons of moderate views and other loyalist elements, was obviously an attempt on the part of the bureaucracy to retain control of the Sikh shrines. But the reform party could not be hoodwinked. It held the general assembly as originally planned on 15-16 November 1920 which was attended by over 10,000 Sikh representatives from all over the country.<sup>4</sup> It expressed its disapproval of the 36-member Advisory Committee appointed by the Government without reference to the Panth and declared that it was, therefore, not representative in character. The assembly elected a bigger committee of its own consisting of 175 members and named it as 'The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee' (S.G.P.C.).<sup>5</sup> To avoid any controversy with the moderates, all the 36 members of the earlier official committee were also included in the enlarged committee.

It was on 12 December 1920 that the newly elected members of the committee met at the Akal Takhat, Amritsar and after having gone through the formal ceremony of scrutiny at the hands of the *Panj Piaras*, the committee was declared duly inaugurated.<sup>6</sup> Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia became the first President of the Committee while Sardar Harbans Singh Attari and Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia became Vice-President and Secretary respectively<sup>7</sup>. At the same meeting a sub-committee of 72 members was formed to draft new rules and regulations for the administration of the Golden Temple, Amritsar. Except for the priests of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat, who had reason to be unhappy because of being deprived of their lucrative offices, all other parties seem to have been satisfied with the new arrangement.<sup>8</sup> The Government noticed with satisfaction the personnel of its presidency and executive, all of whom were known for their moderate and compromising attitude with regard to the Akali movement and were staunch supporters of the British administration. Because of the domination of the moderate and pro-Government elements in the newly formed S.G.P.C. the movement of reform launched by it seems to have aroused no official hostility. Official circles noted with satisfaction that the movement was 'proceeding on constitutional lines'.<sup>9</sup> But by the end of 1920 the situation took a new turn. In early 1921 some of the most militant Akali Jathedars, especially



Kartar Singh Jhabbar and Teja Singh of Chuharkana, renewed the earlier campaign for liberating the Gurdwaras from evil influences.<sup>10</sup> Under the impact of Mahatma Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation, the religious Diwans arranged by the Akali leadership became the centres of religio-political propaganda among the rural classes of the Sikh community. Official circles noticed this sudden change with great consternation.<sup>11</sup>

Since religious enthusiasm and awakening were nursed by the Akali reformers through the press and platform, the Gurdwara reform soon became the dominant issue in the province. According to confidential reports, '...the committee of Sikhs originally appointed at Amritsar to deliberate the management of the Golden Temple was moved by its enthusiasm for the Sikh cause to enter a new and more comprehensive sphere of activity and eventually emerged as the S.G.P.C., the professed objects of which were to obtain control over all the Gurdwaras and religious institutions and to provide for their management on lines acceptable to the Sikh nation.'<sup>12</sup>

In the wake of the tragedy at Nankana, the official involvement in the affair and the policy of repression that followed, the influence of the moderates among the Akali leadership eclipsed. At a meeting held on 20 March 1921, the S.G.P.C. demanded the passage of suitable legislation to secure the redemption of all Gurdwaras and release of all the prisoners convicted in connection with the reform movement, failing which the community was to take recourse to non-cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

The threatened recourse to non-cooperation greatly upset the authorities who were already finding it difficult to meet the challenge of Congress non-cooperation and the Khilafat agitation in the province. The bureaucracy had hitherto been successfully using the Sikh leadership and soldiers to check the advance of nationalism in the province and to combat the Congress and Khilafat volunteers. Addition to ranks of the Volunteers Movement of the 'fanatic' Akalis caused greater concern to the authorities than the Civil Disobedience campaign of Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>14</sup> In a bid to dissuade the Akali leadership from taking a radical step, the Government



issued a communique explaining its attitude towards the reform movement.

This communique failed to convince even the moderates among the reformers, who were by now fully disillusioned with promises of help and sympathy by the Government. With the extremists and non-cooperators, who understood the double-standards being applied by the official machinery, the communique failed to make any appeal at all. The British officials, who expected loyalty and cooperation from the Sikhs in return for their 'practical sympathy and material assistance in the past', were, instead, faced with a formal resolution in favour of non-cooperation and passive resistance.<sup>15</sup>

The position of the extremists and non-cooperators was further strengthened as a result of fresh elections to the S.G.P.C. held in July 1921 under the new constitution prepared and approved by the earlier committee in October 1920. The new constitution provided that four-fifths of the members were to be elected from different constituencies from the province and the Sikh States and one-fifth to be nominated by the elected members.<sup>16</sup> The issue of reform of the Gurdwaras and feelings against the Mahants and the bureaucracy dominated during the elections. In the rising wave of reform and nationalism it was but natural for the extremist elements to make a clean sweep at the elections and outstrip the moderates. Although some moderates were later included in the new committee through nominations, they no longer had an effective influence with the leadership. The new committee elected Sardar Kharak Singh<sup>17</sup> (a professed non-cooperator and a close associate of the Congress, the Central Sikh League, and other nationalist organisations in the country) as its President. An Executive Committee of 31 members consisting 'almost entirely of professed non-cooperators', a working Committee of 7 members and local Committees for the management of the Golden Temple and Nankana Sahib were also formed.<sup>18</sup>

The policy of repression following the Nankana tragedy, the application of the Seditious Meetings Act to the 18 districts in the province, the general arrests of the supporters and sympathisers of the Akali Movement and open incitement of Mahants by the bureaucracy made the new leadership



broaden the base of their struggle against the authorities by enlisting active support of the nationalist forces.<sup>19</sup> It was for this reason that an active liaison was established between the S.G.P.C. and other nationalist organisations like the Indian National Congress, the Khilafat Party and the Central Sikh League. The Congress, besides passing formal resolutions in support of the Akali Movement, rendered active help to the Akalis by sending Congress leaders and volunteers to help them organise their publicity programme.<sup>20</sup> The Khilafat Conference, the Muslim League and the Central Sikh League also passed resolutions of sympathy and support for the Akali cause.<sup>21</sup>

With the growing Akali agitation, especially after the 'Keys' Affair' and during the struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh, the leaders felt the need to streamline their propaganda machinery to refute the official misrepresentations about the Akalis. An Information and Publicity Bureau was set up in February 1923 from which daily communiques were issued. Besides carrying important news items about the movement, they often refuted the official communiques, statements and other orders, challenged the misrepresentation of facts about the Akali Movement and generally gave the Akali version of events. Copies of the communiques were sent to nationalist papers in the country, leaders of the Indian National Congress, the Khilafat, the Sikh League, Sikh Members of the Panjab Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly and other prominent bodies and individuals sympathetic to the Akali cause. On going through the various communiques and their reaction on the native press and general public in the province, one finds that the Publicity Bureau of the S.G.P.C. played an important role in building up a strong public opinion—a factor vital to the success of any popular movement.<sup>22</sup>

The Akali leadership was fully alive to the important role of the press in the success of their movement.<sup>23</sup> Besides enlisting active support and sympathy of some of the important nationalist papers in the country like the *Independent*, *Swarajya*, *Tribune*, *Liberal*, *Kesri*, *Milap*, *Zamindar*, *Bande Matram* etc., the Akali leadership started two vernacular dailies, *The Akali* (Urdu) and the *Akali-te-Pardesi* (Panjabi).<sup>24</sup> Well-known Akali radicals like Master Sunder Singh



Lyallpuri, Sardar Mangal Singh, Sardar Hari Singh and Master Tara Singh managed these papers in one capacity or the other. The two dailies played an important role, first in bringing about the necessary awakening among the Sikh masses and then preparing them to undertake the struggle for reform. As the movement gathered strength, the papers helped the Akali leadership by explaining their stand and by exposing official distortions. Apart from their general appeal to the Sikh masses, bold editorials of the two dailies made a deep impression on the Sikh masses.<sup>25</sup>

Although the nationalist English dailies in the Panjab and outside were helping to publicise the Akali programme to a great extent, the Akali leadership nevertheless felt the need for an English daily of its own. For this purpose the Akali leadership started the *Hindustan Times* and later also acquired interest in the *Nation* of Lahore.<sup>26</sup>

By the time the Panjab Government came forward with its new policy of two-pronged attack on the Akali leadership by creating division among the Akali ranks through the pro-British and loyal elements and by suppressing the movement with force, the top leadership had not only geared up its organisational machinery and established regular liaison with the nationalist forces in the country but had also greatly strengthened its base by establishing a regular link between the various Akali Jathas and by constituting an Akali Fauj. Thus when agitation over the Keys' issue started, the Akali leadership was fully prepared to meet the official challenge. Akali successes over the Keys' issue and their struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh greatly added to the popularity of the S.G.P.C.

The power and prestige of the S.G.P.C. were further enhanced by continued material and moral support from the Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs in the Panjab, and through the backing of the national leaders in the country. Mass support from the Sikh peasantry and the sympathies of the rank and file of the Sikhs and Military pensioners, made the S.G.P.C. aware of the important position it had come to occupy. Realisation of the hardships undergone by the community, martyrdom suffered by nearly 150 reformers at Tarn Taran, Nankana, Guru-ka-Bagh, Panja Sahib and other places



injuries sustained by over 1,500 persons, harsh sentences meted out to over 5,600 others and long terms of imprisonment and heavy fines suffered by the top leadership created great resentment against the British rule. In the face of such feelings, the Akali leadership could not think of responding to the official offer of restoration of the old friendship.<sup>27</sup>

Official circles viewed with concern the Akali leadership's rejection of the Bill, the growing struggle at the Guru-ka-Bagh and the lack of space in the jails to accommodate the increasing number of Akali prisoners. The activities of the Babbar Akalis in the Jullundur Doab and the terror they created among the loyalist and pro-Government elements in the Panjab villages added further to the worries of the higher authorities in India. In order to allay the fears of the Secretary of State for India in London, the Government of India sent him optimistic reports about the Akali situation.<sup>28</sup> But the real facts had already reached London through the Indian representatives of some of the dailies of England. They reported the Akali struggle as a victory for the non-cooperation movement in India and warned the authorities in London of the growing unhappiness of the Indian public with the British Government in India and their increasing support and sympathy for the Akalis.<sup>29</sup> Censure of the unreasonable policy of the authorities in India by the press and Members of Parliament in England and the unofficial reports from India of the increasing number of political murders in the Doaba area by the Babbar militants alarmed the Secretary of State, which is evident from his letter to the Viceroy. 'The newspaper telegrams have been rather alarmist and seem to suggest that the trouble is spreading . . .'<sup>30</sup> In yet another telegram, dated 18 October 1922, he enquired 'whether an effective stop could be put to the operations by the arrest and prosecution of all the organisers (of the Akali Movement) as abettors'.<sup>31</sup>

This telegram revived the possibility of declaring the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal to be unlawful associations. On inviting the opinion of the Government of the Panjab in late October 1922, the authorities in the Government of India were informed by the Chief Secretary of the Panjab Government that though the principal members of the S.G.P.C. had already been arrested and were under trial, the



arrest of all the members, as suggested by the Secretary of State, was not possible for obvious reasons and advised to wait till sufficient evidence was available.<sup>32</sup> The authorities in the Panjab found in the Akali Jathas' march to Naba "sufficient evidence" to implement the advice of the Secretary of State to put an effective stop to the Akali operations by the 'arrest and prosecution of all the organisers as abettors.'<sup>33</sup> The S.G.P.C. was charged with having 'openly encouraged bodies of Akalis to invade Nabha State with the object of intimidating Government and to interfere with the maintenance of law and order'.<sup>34</sup> An order was issued by the Home Department of the Government of the Panjab on 12 October 1923, declaring the S.G.P.C., the Shiromani Akali Dal and various Jathas organised by or affiliated to this body as 'unlawful associations'.<sup>35</sup>

In consequence of the Panjab Government's order to the local officials to carry out the scheme of mass arrests of the Akali leadership all the sixty members of the Interim Committee of the S.G.P.C. were arrested and tried for 'treason against the King Emperor'.<sup>36</sup> Security arrangements in Amritsar were tightened, machine-guns placed at all the main gates of the city and the Army posted at important centres of Akali activity. But the official action did not prove an effective weapon and failed to check the activities of the Akalis. The places of those arrested were soon occupied by others and the organisation continued to function uninterrupted. The leaders in jail at Amritsar continued to be in touch with the new leaders outside through a secret system of their own. All efforts to check the flow of news of the movement and secret correspondence between the leaders inside the jail and those outside proved fruitless. On receiving reports about the regular contact between the Akali leaders in and out of jails, the local Government changed its earlier decision of trying these prisoners in Amritsar in the court of a Special Magistrate, Mr. Henderson and shifted them to the Lahore Fort which was converted into a special jail with a judicial court inside. Here these leaders were tried under section 120, 121-A and 17 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908. Except for two important leaders, Kharak Singh and Mangal Singh, who were already undergoing various terms of imprisonment, all the



remaining members of the Interim Committee were charged with 'treason against the King-Emperor' and awarded different terms of imprisonment.<sup>37</sup>

The authorities failed to achieve their object. A new committee of 62 members came into existence in place of the one arrested by the Government on the night of 13 October and onward march of the Akali Movement continued. Contrary to the expectations of the Government, the new committee adopted an even more aggressive tone in its criticism of the official policy. In defiance of the official order of 12 October declaring the S.G.P.C. and the Akali Jathas to be 'unlawful associations', the committee, which held a meeting of its Executive on 4 November 1923, passed the following resolutions:

- (i) This new Executive Committee of the S.G.P.C. lays on record its firm conviction after careful consideration that it is the duty of every Sikh to protect these religious rights for the defence of which S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal, the representative bodies of the nation, have been declared unlawful by the Government. The new Executive Committee declared its firm and unalterable determination to uphold these rights.
- (ii) The new Executive Committee believes firmly that the Government by declaring the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal as unlawful has levelled a mean attack against the sacred right of association in regard to Sikh religious matters and this meeting expresses its sense of disgust at this attitude of the Government.<sup>38</sup>

Reacting to this defiance of the official proclamations, the Government decided to take strong action against the new committee also. After confirming the C.I.D. reports that this committee was in session at the Akal Takhat and was busy discussing the Nabha Affair—a prohibited issue—the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, Mr. F.H. Puckle, and the Superintendent of Police, Mr. R.C. Jeffreys, with a body of 100 armed policemen in uniform approached the Akal Takhat by a back entrance through the Thara Sahib on the afternoon of 7 January 1924.<sup>39</sup> According to an S.G.P.C. communique



it was for the first time that the police in uniform and with their shoes on had tried to enter the holy precincts of the Durbar Sahib.<sup>40</sup> Bhai Jodh Singh is said to have advised the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police not to enter the Akal Takhat and instead ask by name the leaders they wanted to arrest. He assured them that the leaders concerned would present themselves at the local police station as they had been doing in the past.<sup>41</sup> The Deputy Commissioner did not agree to this suggestion and ordered the police to proceed with the arrests by forcible entry into the Akal Takhat. On this the Akalis, who had in the meanwhile gathered in sufficient numbers, formed a solid wall and blocked the entrance. The Superintendent and his party tried to break through but were pushed back.<sup>42</sup> According to the official version of the incident 'the police encountered resistance from a large crowd of Akali *Sewadars* and were roughly handled'. Finding that it was not possible to enter the Akal Takhat the officials now agreed to act on the earlier suggestion of Bhai Jodh Singh. The Superintendent of Police handed over to Bhai Jodh Singh a list of the persons wanted by the police and was advised by the latter to wait outside for their arrival.<sup>43</sup>

By the time Bhai Jodh Singh arrived with the official list, the committee had finished discussing most of the items on the agenda and had passed resolutions condemning the official action in declaring the S.G.P.C. an unlawful association, appreciating the sacrifices made by the members of the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal, congratulating them 'for their sterling services to the Panth', and describing the official action in stopping the Akhand Path at Jaito as 'the greatest insult to the Sikh Panth'. The committee had also decided to hold 101-Akhand Paths in place of the one disrupted by the Nabha State officials and authorised its Executive 'to deal with the situation and protect the honour of the Sikh religion.'<sup>44</sup>

After completing their work all the 62 members of the new Interim Committee came down from the upper storey of the Akal Takhat and after offering prayers they went out to the Clock Tower to court arrest where the Superintendent of Police and his party were waiting for them.<sup>45</sup> These leaders were tried under Section 17 (2) of the Criminal Law Amend-



ment Act in the court of the First Class Magistrate at Amritsar. Leaving aside two members—Rattan Singh Azad and Niranjan Singh Tansen—who were acquitted, the remaining leaders, following the decided policy of non-cooperation, neither admitted to any charges nor defended themselves. In the judgement, 57 of them were convicted under Section 17 (2) and awarded varying terms of imprisonment.

The arrest of the new committee also failed to achieve its object. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar admitted in private that the authorities had failed to make a sudden entry at the Akal Takhat and to give the Akali leaders a surprise. The officials also failed to carry out the arrests themselves so as to establish moral supremacy over the Akalis. This, as Mr. Puckle wrote to H.D. Craik, 'was a victory for the Akalis at the Akal Takhat in that they prevented the forces of the Government from accomplishing their purpose'.<sup>46</sup>

After the arrest of the second Interim Committee, a third committee succeeded it. The new Committee again held a conference to challenge the authority of the Government and to defy its orders. This committee was also arrested. But, instead of its members being tried in the courts and awarded punishments, they were shortly afterwards released on the plea that they were not prominent leaders of the movement.

Implementation of the advice of the Secretary of State and the tactics of the new Governor, Sir Malcolm Hailey, failed to achieve any tangible results. Arrests of the three successive committees and leaders of the allied organisations could not curb the movement. The official action against the Akali leadership became the object of intense criticism in the native press. *The Akali* warned the authorities that declaring the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal to be 'unlawful associations' and by ordering the arrests of the three successive Interim Committees, 'the Government has so to say admitted the whole Panth to be seditious'.<sup>47</sup> In another issue the paper wrote, 'if the thought of liberty, plain speaking and national Jathabandi constitutes rebellion, all Sikhs are rebels . . .'.<sup>48</sup> Identical opinions were expressed by other nationalist papers also.

In the bazaars of Amritsar the Akalis moved in a defiant



mood yelling, 'we are the members of an unlawful association, we are rebels . . . .'. But the authorities failed to check their activities. Rattan Singh Azad, who had earlier been arrested in the second committee but was later acquitted, wrote a book entitled *Baagi-Sikh Ke Sarkar*<sup>49</sup> (Who is the Rebel—the Sikhs or the Government ?), in which he taunted the Viceroy, Lord Reading: 'Has your weapon gone blunt ? Is it not a violation of the rules that the members of the Shiromani Akali Dal are not being arrested ?' He further wrote that 'in spite of the Government's orders to prosecute the papers publishing S.G.P.C. communiques, no editor, printer or publisher is being arrested'. After thus failing to achieve their object by force and diplomacy, the authorities were compelled to open a fresh dialogue with the S.G.P.C. for a legitimate solution of the Akali problem which resulted in the passage of the Sikh Gurdwara and Shrines Bill in the Panjab Legislative Council in July 1925.

When the members of the Central Board elected under the provisions of the above-mentioned Act met in the Town Hall, Amritsar, on 2 October 1926, they decided to name the Board the 'Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee'. Wisdom seems then to have supervened. The Panjab Government withdrew orders declaring the S.G.P.C. and other Akali organs 'unlawful association', and recognised the S.G.P.C. as a representative body of the Sikhs.<sup>50</sup>

In making the Panjab Government agree to the acceptance of the S.G.P.C. as the sole body for the control of the Sikh shrines, the Akali leadership undoubtedly scored a victory over the bureaucracy. But the conditions imposed for the release of the Akali prisoners and serious differences of opinion and ultimate division among the ranks of the Akali leadership over the working of the Act made this triumph ring hollow.

In his Address to the Panjab Legislative Council on 9 July 1925, Sir Malcolm Hailey, the Governor of Panjab, while making a reference to the appeals of Sikh Members of the Council for a general amnesty to all the Akali prisoners, remarked that though 'the appeal is powerful and the Government has considered it with every sympathy' it was not possible 'to agree to a general or unconditional amnesty'.<sup>51</sup> Hailey seems to have realised that such an action would be



interpreted as another victory for the Akalis and the nationalist forces in the country. On the other hand, in imposing conditions on their release that they would work the Bill and would not use force in taking possession of the shrines in future, and thus creating divisions in the Akali ranks (as in fact later happened) he thought that would not only render negative the victory of the Akalis but also achieve the object of extricating the Government from an untenable situation. This he indicated in one of his casual talks, 'Why delay the Bill and let the Government get the blame? Give it to them, and also their Gurdwaras. They will then quarrel among themselves and the Government will be free to do something else.'<sup>52</sup> In granting the Akalis the Bill and also the Gurdwaras, Hailey had achieved 'the first part of his goal. The second—to see them quarrelling—which in fact was more important to the Government, was yet to be achieved. Hailey, who had better knowledge about the Sikhs and their psyche, thought diplomacy and Machiavellian tactics were the best weapon to trounce the Akali leadership. Just two days after the passage of the Bill, he declared:

The Panjab Government will release (or will withdraw from the prosecution) any person (other than those persons who have been convicted of or are under trial for crimes of violence or incitement to such crimes) who has been convicted by the Criminal Court or is under trial in such courts, on charges arising out of the recent agitation in the Sikh community, or on charges involving offences against the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act.<sup>53</sup>

His declaration not only defined the categories of prisoners to be still detained but imposed further conditions on the release of the first category:

Provided that such release will be conditional on such persons signing an undertaking that they will obey the provisions of the law recently enacted securing to the Sikh community the control and management of shrines and their endowments, and will not seek, by means of force, or show of force, or by criminal trespass again control or



possession of any shrines or the property attached to it or its endowments.<sup>54</sup>

Perusal of a large number of statements, letters and other correspondence exchanged between the Akali leaders in the Lahore Fort Jail and others outside on the issue of the conditions for release indicates that Hailey succeeded not only in preventing the Akali leadership from claiming another victory against the Government but also in breaking the united front which they had always presented in the past. Out of the 36 important Akali leaders in the Lahore Fort Jail only 19 were prepared to assure the Government that they would work the Bill. But even these leaders made it clear that their acceptance to work the Bill should not be interpreted as their willingness to sign a written undertaking or accept conditions on their release.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, they added the following matter to the earlier statement in which they appealed the Panth to work the Bill whole-heartedly: 'But we wish to make it perfectly clear that we are not prepared to give any undertaking as a condition of our release'. Other leaders numbering 13 altogether opposed even this move while the remaining refused to make any definite promise as long as they were in jail. In a letter from the Lahore Fort Jail dated 25 July 1925, Sardar Gurcharan Singh and others wrote to Sardar Mangal Singh that the action of the 19 leaders in giving a written statement assuring the working of the Bill 'was dangerous to the welfare of the community and will create a split in our camp'.<sup>56</sup> In another urgent letter, dated 5 August 1925, these leaders expressed concern at the rumours that the leadership was in favour of creating two separate parties—one for working the Act and the other to oppose it. These leaders described this policy as 'very dangerous and against all principles of morality'.<sup>57</sup>

The fears of these leaders regarding the split in the Akali ranks were confirmed when the General Committee of the S.G.P.C. at a meeting on 4 October, 1925 to consider its reaction towards the Gurdwara Act, found itself divided into three different camps: the first party favoured accepting the Act and ending all action without waiting for the release of the Akali prisoners; the second wanted to reject the Act unless



Government released the Akali prisoners unconditionally, and the third was for postponing the decision on the question till the detailed rules under the Act were published.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the Committee carried resolutions approving the action of the Working Committee in suspending the morcha at Bhai Pheru, expressing satisfaction at the successful termination of the *Akhand Path* at Jaito and advising the Panth to accept the Act and work it wholeheartedly.<sup>59</sup>

This development was to the entire satisfaction of the official circles. Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, congratulated Hailey on his "successful handling" of the Sikh problem. Acceptance of the conditional release by most of the moderate leaders in jail on giving written or verbal undertakings to work the Act and refusal by the extremists like Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh, Teja Singh Samundri and others, further widened the breach in the Akali camp and was considered a feather in Hailey's cap. S.B. Mehtab Singh, Giani Sher Singh, Bawa Harkishan Singh and other moderates, after their conditional release captured the leadership of the S.G.P.C. formed under the Gurdwara Act of 1925. Later, Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh and other extremists came out of jail without giving any verbal or written undertaking and started a strong agitation against the 'Sardar Bahadur Party' and succeeded in dislodging them from the position they had occupied with the help of the Government.

Baba Kharak Singh who remained President of the S.G.P.C. from October, 1926 to October 1930, was greatly responsible for providing a radical and nationalist tone to the Akali politics. Known for his close association with the nationalist leaders and a firm critic of the British rule he ensured that during his tenure as the President of the S.G.P.C. the Sikh shrines were not used for attacking the nationalist elements among the Sikh community and for honouring the British officials as had been done in the past. A careful perusal of the statement giving detailed account of the various leaders who remained Presidents of this august body would show that with one or two exceptions when the non-Akalis managed to capture the S.G.P.C. generally it has been the Shiromani Akali Dal which has been traditionally controlling the



S.G.P.C. also. In 1930 elections to the S.G.P.C. Master Tara Singh, an equally staunch nationalist with strong anti-British bias, was elected President of the S.G.P.C. while in the subsequent elections Master Tara Singh was replaced by Gopal Singh Quami for a brief period of four months (June to October 1933) and later by Partap Singh Shankar (Oct 1933 to June 1936). Master Tara Singh recaptured the S.G.P.C. in June 1936 and remained its President till November 1944.<sup>60</sup> Soon after the independence the Congress tried to capture the S.G.P.C. and partially succeeded when its nominee Udham Singh Nagoke was elected S.G.P.C. President (June 1948 to March 1950), the later history of the S.G.P.C. reveals that it was Master Tara Singh or his lieutenants who generally remained in the control of the S.G.P.C. However, it is Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tohra who has managed to remain in continued control of the S.G.P.C. since January, 1933 (with one year's exception when Sardar Kabul Singh held this office) and has been greatly responsible for unprecedented developments in recent Akali politics. With the election of two parallel committees of the S.G.P.C. in October 1937, with one group electing Tohra and the other group claiming Harcharan Singh Hudiara as President of the Committee, this powerful Sikh organisation is facing serious crisis threatening its very existence.



# 6

## THE SHIROMANI AKALI DAL

A combination of three Punjabi words Shiromani Akali Dal literally means the premier organisation of the Akalis—the immortal ones—and has been the most powerful representative body of the Sikhs since its inception on December 14, 1920.<sup>1</sup> In spite of differences of opinion among the Akali leaders on different issues and emergence of the splinter groups from time to time the Shiromani Akali Dal has remained in supreme control of the religious and political concerns of the Sikhs throughout.

Eversince its emergence the Shiromani Akali Dal has claimed itself to be the sole spokesman of the 'Sikh interests' and has been launching powerful political agitations in the name of the Sikh community. Use of religious slogans and religious places for the attainment of political goals has been its greatest asset as well as liability. It has been an asset because with a sensitive minority like the Sikhs religion has been used as the most powerful ideology to involve the sturdy peasantry which has been the backbone of most of the political agitations launched by the Shiromani Akali Dal. And this has been, and, unfortunately continues to be, a liability because religion and religion-based politics of the Shiromani Akali Dal has not allowed the Akali Party to emerge as a regional alternative to the Congress in the Punjab on the pattern of Telugu Desam or D.M.K.

With its continued hold over the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and vast influence in terms of money and manpower, the Shiromani Akali Dal continues to wield



tremendous power and political influence since the heyday of the Akali Movement (1920-25). It is interesting to observe that while there are a number of other religious, cultural and political organisations of the Sikhs, it is the Shiromani Akali Dal alone which has come to be recognised as the sole spokesman of the Sikhs both in the religious as well as political fields. And again it is the Shiromani Akali Dal alone which has been spearheading all the major agitations in the Panjab and providing necessary initiative, leadership and support in the form of Akali Jathas all these years. Akali agitation for Gurdwara reform (1920-25), Sikh struggle for the creation of a Punjabi speaking state (1945-46), Akali morcha against internal emergency in India (1955-56) and recent Akali agitation (1955-56), are some of the more important examples of the Akali Dal's capacity for launching powerful morchas on issues both religious and secular.<sup>2</sup>

Passage of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill in 1925 by the British Government on the terms acceptable to the Shiromani Akali Dal, later Mrs. Indira Gandhi conceding the Akali demand for Punjabi Suba in 1946 and more recently Rajiv Gandhi's signing of the Panjab Accord with the President of the Shiromani Akali Dal alone by ignoring all other religious-political organisations of the Sikhs, has indirectly amounted to legitimising the Akali Dal's claim of being the sole spokesman of the entire Sikh Community. It is interesting to note that both before and after the independence. Quite a few Sikh political organisations, such as the Central Sikh League, the Central Akali Dal and similar other organisations were organised to counter the influence of the Shiromani Akali Dal but none could make any noticeable dent in its traditional hold over the Sikh masses. I think it would be worthwhile to examine the origin and heritage of the Dal and the past agitations which made it emerge as the most powerful religious-political party of the Sikhs in the Panjab.

Though the Akalis during the present century first appeared in an organised form and in their typical dress during the summer of 1920, the history of their origin and growth is much older than that of the Akali Movement and their two most powerful and representative bodies—the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.<sup>3</sup>



The word Akali, meaning immortal, was first used by Guru Gobind Singh for those of his select followers who were prepared to risk their all for the protection of their places of religion. Their dark blue garments, typical head-dress (consisting of tall conical turbans, quoits, double-edged swords and *Kirpans*) and their fanatical temperament made them zealous fighters for religious causes. Because of their fearlessness and invincibility they also came to be known as the Nihangs. They were known for the purity of character and sincerity of purpose and commanded great respect among the Sikh community. In the field of religion they enjoyed an enviable supremacy and were regarded as the real guardians of the Akal Takht and other important and historic Sikh shrines. During the dark days of the Sikh-history they had to undergo great sufferings and hardships in keeping alive the torch of the faith. But during the days of the Sikh rule in Panjab and consequent lethargy that generally accompanies the attainment of power, the Akalis like other Sikhs also retired to an easy life and came to lose that spirit and fiery demeanor associated with them. It was the Akali movement in the twenties of the present century which revived the old spirit and glory of the Akalis. With the beginning of the Gurdwara reform movement the Akalis seem to have staged a come-back but with a difference; the new order had little in common with the old. As the Akalis had for a long period of time been the custodians of the Sikh temples and were known for the sacrifices they made to preserve the ceremonial purity, the word Akali came to be regarded as a symbol of purity and strict morality. Thus all those Sikhs who supported Gurdwara reform and were prepared to suffer like the Akalis of the yester years to achieve their object, came to be addressed as Akalis. Unlike their predecessors they were not violent but adopted non-violence as their creed.

In the beginning there was no organised system for the recruitment of the Akali volunteers to help in the liberation of the Sikh shrines from their hereditary custodians who were misusing the Gurdwaras and the *jagirs* attached to them. All those who were desirous of joining the ranks of the reformers and were prepared to sacrifice for the cause, came to be known as the Akalis. Later, when the movement gained momentum,



a regular system of recruitment of the Akali volunteers was started. Though a number of Akali *Jathas* had come into existence to carry on reform in their respective areas there was no central organisation to co-ordinate and supervise their work. To help the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, which came to be established on November 16, 1920, with a solid base of activists in the form of various *Jathas* and to co-ordinate and supervise the work of various reform *Jathas* in their areas, a central organisation of the Akalis was formed on December 14, 1920 and named as the Shiromani Akali Dal. Sardul Singh Caveeshar,<sup>4</sup> who was greatly active in enlisting *Jathas* in various areas, was appointed as the first President of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Technically the Shiromani Akali Dal and the *Jathas* of volunteers under its control were supposed to work within the general framework decided by the organisational wing, the S.G.P.C., but in actual practice the Akali militants often ignored authority of the S.G.P.C. They often overstepped the limits fixed by the S.G.P.C. Consequently, with the passage of time, the Shiromani Akali Dal, instead of being grouped in the category of a subordinate organisation of the S.G.P.C., developed an independent identity of its own working more or less on similar lines for the achievement of a common goal and later emerged as a political party.

As the tempo of Gurdwara reform quickened and the Akali struggle took a definite shape, individual efforts of the Akalis were supplanted by those of well-defined *Jathas* of reformers from different areas. To Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar<sup>5</sup> goes the credit of having formed the first ever organised *Jatha* for the purpose of reforming Gurdwara Janam Asthan and other shrines at Nankana Sahib.<sup>6</sup> It was on December 24, 1920, that some prominent Akali workers of the area met at the Gurdwara Maharani Nakam at Sheikhpura and formed a *Jatha* named as Akali Jatha Khara Sauda Bar.<sup>7</sup> With a numerical strength of over 2200 Akalis with Kartar Singh Jhabbar as its Jathedar it was one of the strongest Akali *Jathas* and was responsible for taking over the control of the Sikh Shrines in Nankana Sahib from the Deputy Commissioner after the Nankana tragedy. Formation of similar *Jathas* found favour in other Sikh districts and soon



they began to appear all over the Central Panjab. By the time Akali leadership launched its struggle over the Keys' affair about a dozen prominent Jathas were ready to help the Shiromani Akali Dal in the execution of its programme.

In addition to the Akali Jathas a central force of Akali volunteers, called the Akali Fauj, was also organised under the direct supervision of the Shiromani Akali Dal. British C.I.D. officials described this new institution as 'a Sikh reproduction of the widespread Volunteer Movement of the Congress'<sup>8</sup>. The Akali Fauj was planned as an organisation of selfless Sikh volunteers prepared to sacrifice their lives at the call of the Akali leadership for the cause of religious reform. Unlike other Akali Jathas, the Akali Fauj of 30,000 strong, functioned on military lines, marched in four, wore badges, carried flags and organised camps. Of all the Akali Jathas the one that worried the British Government the most was the Akali Fauj.<sup>9</sup> It enjoyed the solid backing of the extreme left-wing Sikh organisation called the Central Sikh League.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the organisational efficiency the other most significant achievement of the Akalis was their ability to win over other nationalist forces in the country and the nationalist press. Those so-called unlettered Akali leaders of the past had the vision to start a leading English daily, the *Hindustan Times* in addition to two vernacular dailies -- *The Akali* and *Akali-te-Pardesi*. Well-known Akali radicals of the time such as Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri, Sardar Mangal Singh, Giani Hira Singh Dard and Master Tara Singh<sup>11</sup> managed these papers in one capacity or the other. The two dailies played an important role, first in bringing about necessary awakening among the Sikh masses and then preparing them to undertake the struggle for reform. As the movement gathered momentum, these papers helped the Akali leadership by explaining their stand and by exposing official distortions and thus winning popular public opinion.

With such an organised machinery at their command and sense of unity, mutual trust and self-sacrifice as their guiding spirit there was no wonder in the Akali Dal marching from victory to victory. Unconditional release of the Akali prisoners arrested in connection with the keys' affair<sup>12</sup> and a gazetted



officer of the British government returning the keys of the Toshakhana to Baba Kharak Singh in a Diwan especially arranged at Akal Takht for the purpose was nothing less than the Government surrendering before the Akalis.

However, when the Government in Panjab noticed that the Akalis were isolated as a result of the suspension of the Non-cooperation Movement and arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and other important Congress leaders it thought of retrieving its lost prestige by challenging the Akalis over a rather insignificant issue. As discussed in detail in the preceding chapters cutting of the dry *Kikkar* trees for use in *Langar* at Guru-Ka-Bagh was described as 'stealing of property' and the volunteers indulging in such action were quickly arrested. It seems the government was thinking of 'teaching a lesson' to the Akalis and thus setting an example before the nationalist forces which had been backing them in their struggle against government in Panjab. It was this trial of strength which resulted in powerful agitation at Guru-Ka-Bagh in which the Shiromani Akali Dal again emerged triumphant. It was during its hour of victory that the Shiromani Akali Dal launched another powerful agitation on an issue not purely religious. It was during the Akali agitation in the Nabha state that the Congress leadership, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru, came closer to the Akalis. As a result of Congress openly supporting the Akalis in their agitation during the keys' affair, the Guru-Ka-Bagh and Jaito Morcha, a strong bondage of friendship came to exist between the two organisations.

As a result of Akali Congress cooperation during the early phases of the struggle the Akali leaders got involved in country's struggle for freedom. It was not surprising therefore to find them quickly responding to the Congress call during future agitations, the Civil Disobedience Movement and later the Quit India Movement. In spite of the differences of opinion here and there the Akali leaders by and large sided with the Congress and finally decided to cast their lot with India in spite of pressures from the Muslim League and the British Officials.

However, cracks started appearing in the old Akali Congress friendship soon after India got its freedom. Akali anxiety to capture power in Panjab, where the Sikhs had come



to constitute a majority after the partition and Congress's inability to accommodate the Akali claims resulted in increasing sense of frustration among the Akali leaders. Being unable to capture power through electoral battle the Akali leaders, especially Master Tara Singh, thought of launching a major agitation against the Congress-ruled centre for not fulfilling the promises made to the Akali leaders during various parleys for transfer of power. Failure of the two experiments of Akali-Congress coalition in Panjab made the Akali leaders believe that the only alternative before them was to ask for reorganisation of the state to ensure that it becomes a full Sikh majority state. While majority of the Hindu population of Panjab and the Congress ruled centre cannot be exonerated from sharing the blame—the former denying Punjabi as their mother tongue and the latter not supporting Panjab's reorganisation on linguistic lines when this had been done in the case of all other states—what really complicated the issue was the stand the Akali leadership took over the issue. Rather than making the demand for Punjabi Suba a regional issue the Akali leaders made it appear to be a Sikh, nay purely Akali, demand and unwittingly giving it a communal colour.

Master Tara Singh, who had fallen with the Congress leadership in independent India, made no secret of his ambitions that he wanted a new state where the Sikhs should be in a dominant position. He also gave sufficient vent to his feelings that the Akali leadership had been betrayed by the Congress after independence. Various statements of Master Tara Singh and his lieutenants created an impression in the mind of Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders that Master Tara Singh was working for the creation of a Sikh state under the garb of his demand for Punjabi Suba. Local Congress leaders in Punjab did not make any serious effort to voice the grievance of the people of the state and advocate redemarcation of Panjab on linguistic lines as had been done in the case of other states in free India. Partap Singh Kairon, who ruled the Panjab state as Congress Chief Minister thought he could check the growing tide in favour of Punjabi Suba through sheer force. Stiff stand of the Akali leadership and equally unreasonable attitude of the Congress ruled centre created a confrontational situation which prevailed for nearly a decade of agitation for Punjabi



Suba. However, situation took a dramatic turn with the emergence of Sant Fateh Singh, an old protege of Master Tara Singh on the Akali scene, who introduced a new convincing note to the Punjabi Suba demand by emphatically stating that the Akali leadership did not want a Sikh majority state "We are not concerned about the percentages... " said Fateh Singh. At the same time the Akali Dal under Sant Fateh Singh succeeded in weakening the Hindu opposition to Punjabi Suba demand by supporting demand for a separate state of Haryana and thereby creating a wedge between the Harijanis and the Punjabi Hindus. The shift in Akali Dal's stand made it easier for Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who had by then taken over as the Prime Minister of India, to accept the long standing demand for reorganisation of Panjab on linguistic basis. It was under these circumstances that the new linguistic state of Panjab emerged in November 1916.

However, the struggle of the Akalis did not end with the creation of a Punjabi speaking state. Chandigarh, the capital of the Panjab, hydel projects and headworks were placed under the central control. To get these transferred to Panjab Sant Fateh Singh announced a fast-unto-death on December 17, 1917 and threatened to commit self-immolation in case his demands were not met. While Fateh Singh broke his fast on an assurance of an Award from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, repeated breaking of the solemn vows by the Akali leaders prompted Darshan Singh Pheruman, otherwise with Congress ideology, to go on a hunger strike on August 19, 1919, to get Chandigarh transferred to Panjab. Pheruman met a martyr's end on October 27, 1927 with the Akali demands still hanging fire. To vindicate his honour after the martyrdom of Pheruman, Fateh Singh took yet another fast unto death with the old threat of self-immolation. This compelled the Prime Minister to announce her Award on January 29, 1930, giving Chandigarh to Panjab and cotton-rich Fazilka and Abohar to be given to Haryana as a compensation. Since such an arrangement was not acceptable to the Akali Dal the struggle continued with a number of more grievances being added to the list from time to time, especially those highlighted in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of the Working Committee of the Akali Dal in October, 1933.



Inept handling of the situation by the Centre and the Akali Dal complicated matters further. It is interesting here to note that it were the splinter groups and leaders ousted from the Akali Dal who raised irresponsible and extremist slogans to come into the limelight again. Inability of the Shiromani Akali Dal to counter the influence of the splinter groups and mishandling of the Bhindrawale phenomenon both by the Akali Dal and Central Government led to disastrous consequences in 1984. While the Akali Dal has come to political power in Panjab as a result of its electoral victory in 1985 it is finding it difficult to satisfy the aspirations of a large number of Sikh population in the province. Akali Dal's anxiety to provide regional alternative to the Congress rule in Panjab without giving up its religion based politics really stands in the way of the Shiromani Akali Dal emerging as a non-communal regional party in the state.

It is time the Akali leadership makes use of its heritage and broadens the scope of its struggle by giving a regional tone to its religious struggle. Issues like the transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking areas to Panjab, control over Bhakra Dam, Madhopur and other headworks do not concern the Akalis or the Sikhs alone. On these and other issues discussed in 'Economic Policy and Programme of the Akali Dal' the Akali leadership would do well to forge a common front consisting of all Punjabis irrespective of their religious and political ideologies. Like the past the present Akali leadership should make serious efforts to win back the confidence of the non-Sikh population in and outside Panjab and get their grievances redressed through peaceful agitations and parleys.



## THE POLITICS OF TERRORISM

While the mainstream of the Sikhs supported the peaceful agitation led by the Akali leadership there have been splinter groups and individuals who did not approve such a strategy. After parting company with the main leadership these individuals organised themselves in the form of Chakarvarti Dals and later the Babbar Akali Jathas and started a parallel militant movement of their own popularly called the Babbar Akali movement. The militant group, which included a large number of returned emigrants, Ghadrites and retired and demobilised soldiers, was bitter at the imperialist policies of the British Government and their measures of repression against popular movements. They were also unhappy with the Congress leadership and the Gandhian weapon of non-violent non-cooperation which, they felt, was an attempt to bridle the struggle of the peasants against imperialism. The tragedy of Nankana and the official support to the Mahants further disillusioned them with the Akali leadership and their method of non-violent satyagraha. Rejecting the peaceful struggle for reform in the Sikh shrines as also the Gandhian weapon of passive suffering as 'unworkable', these zealots decided to part company with the dominant Akali leadership in order to organise a militant movement of their own.

The breakaway wing made its first formal appearance during the Sikh Educational Conference held at Hoshiarpur on 19-21 March, 1921. Later they organised a separate meeting on 21 May, 1921. The meeting was attended among others by Master Mota Singh, Kishan Singh, Amar Singh, Tota Singh



Peshawari, Gurbachan Singh and Buttan Singh and a number of returned emigrants from Canada. According to a C.I.D. report, the following definite programme was agreed upon:

1. To create a rising in the Patiala State;
2. To endeavour to get into touch with the Bolsheviks across the Frontier and to arrange outbreak on the Frontier which should synchronise with the outbreak in Patiala.
3. To foment trouble in Central Panjab.
4. To collect men, arms and ammunition; and
5. To eliminate certain officials and non-officials condemned as enemies of the Khalsa Panth.<sup>2</sup>

It was decided that those responsible for the massacre of the Akalis at Nankana should be assassinated. Militant leaders argued that such an action was necessary in order to teach a lesson to the toadies and to demonstrate to the Government that self-respect and revolutionary spirit was very much alive in the Sikh community. It was felt that Mr. C.M. King, the Commissioner of Lahore Division, J.W. Bowring the Superintendent of Police, Mahants Devi Dass and Basant Dass, Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia and Baba Kartar Singh Bedi were responsible for the Nankana massacre and should therefore be assassinated.<sup>3</sup>

In the emergence of the militant group among the Akalis the revolutionary spirit of the Ghadrites seems to have been resurrected. Like the Ghadrites the sphere of the Babbar Akali activities was also confined mainly to the two districts of Jullundur and Hoshiarpur.<sup>4</sup> Many of the Babbar Akalis were returned emigrants and used 0.32 calibre revolvers and Mauser pistols which the Ghadrites had used earlier. Like the Ghadrites, the Babbars were alleged to have established a regular liaison with the revolutionary movements outside the country. Officialdom in the Panjab believed that 'they received large sums of money for revolutionary propaganda from their counterparts still in America and Canada.'<sup>5</sup> Finally, again like the Ghadrites, the new group of revolutionary terrorists moved from place to place explaining their viewpoint to the people in the province. After making an appeal to the



martial instincts of the Sikhs and stressing the inefficacy of the Akali leadership's peaceful approach, the Babbars urged the people to resort to arms.<sup>6</sup>

Through the medium of religious Diwans and by distributing articles and leaflets, the Babbars created a degree of discontent among the rural population of the Jullundur Doab. In one of their leaflets the Babbars made the following passionate appeal to the people of the Doaba to rise in rebellion against the foreigners:

- As the Indian movement has subsided, the Tenth Guru has, therefore, in his infinite mercy, sent the Babbar to help the nation out of its critical situation. The Babbar will make his appearance in the Doaba where the Sikh army stands drawn up in battle array. He will expose the secret of the *Feringhees* who will shriek with pain.

The paper further called upon the readers to:

bring about anarchy by means of *Khanda* (double-edged sword), cut down the foreigner and purge the land of sinful deeds. . . and burn the police stations, plunder the treasuries, place gun powder under the railway lines, raid the magazines, steal arms and sing the song of liberty.

The paper called upon the Hindus and the Muslims to join the Khalsa in their war against the foreigner and adopt the creed of violence as this alone will bring the final victory.<sup>7</sup>

In pursuance of their programme, the Babbars sent Tota Singh Peshawari to the North-West Frontier to procure arms and ammunition.<sup>8</sup> According to official reports they were able to acquire a small collection of assorted weapons and ammunition. After obtaining the necessary arms, Bela Singh and Ganda Singh were deputed to murder Mr. J.W. Bowring for his alleged involvement in the Nankana tragedy. The two visited Lahore on 23 May 1921, but had to return disappointed on discovering that Mr. Bowring was out of the town on that day. While moving about carelessly on the Lahore railway station, they were suspected by the police and arrested. In the course of their interrogation the two divulged the whole



conspiracy. As a result, many other members of the group including Amar Singh, Narain Singh, Tota Singh, Chatar Singh, Chanchal Singh, Thakur Singh and Shankar Singh were arrested. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Master Mota Singh, Bijla Singh and Kishan Singh who had managed to dodge the police.<sup>9</sup>

The Akali leadership, on learning about the Babbar plan to murder those responsible for the Nankana massacre, exhorted the Sikhs not to associate themselves with the activities of the Babbars as the latter's programme clashed with the decided policy of non-violence adopted by the S.G.P.C.<sup>10</sup> But the Babbars continued their programme of reform through murders despite the open disavowal of their methods by the Akali leadership and the arrest of some of their colleagues.

The Babbar leaders claimed that they took a note of warning from the fact that the failure of the Ghadr movement was for lack of support by the people. They realised that before launching their struggle against the official machinery and its supporters, it was necessary to awaken the rural masses and to enlist their sympathy and support for the Babbar cause. It was with this object that a Jatha was organised in November 1921 which was to travel through different parts of the province and to arouse the people to revolt against the British Government. It was also planned to paralyse the supports of the bureaucracy—the *Zaildars*, *Sufedphoshes*, *Lambardars*, *Patwaris*, police informers and other toadies—by terrorising them through various forms of chastisement.<sup>11</sup>

After having prepared a tentative plan of action, Kishan Singh, the moving spirit behind the Babbar movement, announced a detailed programme in his speech at a *mela* held at village Mastuana (Jind State). By quoting from the *Zafar Namah* of Guru Gobind Singh he declared that it was legitimate to resort to arms when peaceful means had failed to achieve the object. At the above mentioned Diwan Karam Singh Babbar recited the following poem with a view to arouse the martial instincts of the Panjabis:

*Khanda pakro shero akhe Babbar vangar*  
*Khanda pakar san te lao, tej karo do dhar*  
*Bin Khande na mile azadi, Kehnda Babbar vangar*



(Catch hold of the double-edged dagger  
So the Babbar declares aloud,  
Sharpen both its edges on the whetting stone  
Without the dagger freedom cannot be won).<sup>12</sup>

At the same Diwan Kishan Singh announced his programme of 'reforming'<sup>13</sup> those responsible for the Nankana tragedy and other acts of cruelty.

Kishan Singh delivered similar speeches in various other parts of the province and exhorted the people to give up non-violence. He also won over Sant Kartar Singh, Babu Santa Singh, Master Mota Singh, Sunder Singh and other militants, and thus strengthened the Babbar organisation. Some old Ghadrites and emigrants, such as Karam Singh and Asa Singh, also joined the Babbar ranks. Kishan Singh is also said to have done some political work among the Sikh soldiers at Jullundur cantonment with a view to obtaining arms and ammunition.<sup>14</sup> Having thus strengthened the Babbar organisation, Kishan Singh intensified revolutionary propaganda among the Sikh peasantry. Some important Babbar leaders were placed in charge of various Jathas to organise conferences in different parts of the Panjab and the Sikh States.<sup>15</sup>

In August 1922, the organisational set-up of the Babbars developed a new vitality when a general meeting of the different Jathas was convened at Gajowal. Here a regular working committee of the Babbar Akali Party was elected with Kishan Singh as Jathedar, Dalip Singh Gosal as Secretary and Baba Santa Singh as Treasurer. The meeting also decided to reinforce the propaganda machinery of the Babbar movement by starting a cyclostyled paper called *Babbar Akali Doaba Akhbar* with Karam Singh Daultpur as its editor. He was asked to prepare a list of police informers, toadies and other Government agents with a view to penalising them for their treacherous role in opposing the Babbar movement.<sup>16</sup> It was also decided to merge the various Jathas and to rename their organisation as the 'Babbar Akali Jathas'.<sup>17</sup>

The *Babbar Akali Doaba Akhbar* which began appearing as a monthly from September 1922 regularly highlighted the desperate economic condition of the people and their exploitation at the hands of a foreign Government. It also drew the



attention of the masses, particularly that of the Sikh peasantry, to the Akali Movement and pointed out the futility of the Akali programme of passive suffering. According to an official report the paper 'exhorted the Akalis to abandon the non-violent doctrines of the S.G.P.C, and called upon them to revolt, to kill the foreigners and to establish a free Government. . . .' The report further states that the Babbar leaflet also 'incited the soldiers to murder their European Officers'.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the Akali leadership's disavowal of the Babbar programme and their techniques and of the S.G.P.C.'s advice to the Sikhs to dissociate themselves from such dangerous doctrines, the Babbars seem to have attracted a large number of adherents from the Sikh peasantry of the Jullundur Doab. Encouraged by the favourable response, Kishan Singh summoned yet another meeting of the various Babbar Jathas on 25 December 1922 at Jassowal. It was attended by all prominent Babbars including Dalip Singh, Karam Singh and Santa Singh.<sup>19</sup> At the meeting Jathedar Kishan Singh indicated with satisfaction the favourable climate that had been created in the Doaba area as a result of the Babbar propaganda and stressed the need to put into practice the Babbar programme of 'reforming' the toadies. He also pointed out that such an action was necessary to forestall the official attempts to sabotage the Babbar organisation while it would help strike terror among pro-Government elements in the villages. The meeting unanimously decided to bring out the next issue of the *Babbar Akali Doaba Akhbar* and to publish the Jatha's decision to 'reform' those who were assisting the authorities.

Within a short time, another meeting of the general body of the Babbar Jathas was called at Jassowal on 30-31 December 1922 in which the working committee announced the following important decisions:

- (i) The working committee alone was to decide when and by whom a particular toady was to be murdered. Members were advised not to initiate any arbitrary action in this regard;
- (ii) In case of a member coming across a toady all of a



sudden, it was advisable to murder him after a careful consideration;

- (iii) Belongings of the toadies were not to be removed without the prior instruction of the working committee. In case of a member coming across any valuables or money the same was to be passed on to the organisation for the purchase of necessary arms;
- (iv) Children of the toadies were not to be touched nor their women insulted in the course of the Babbar action against them;
- (v) Only those could remain members of the Babbar Jathas who were prepared to execute the orders of the working committee, giving up all other engagements;
- (vi) The earlier decision of chopping off the noses and ears of the toadies was to be replaced by the new decision to murder them as the former operation took a longer time and could be used as a constant reminder of the Babbars and was likely to cause hatred against them;
- (vii) Every murder was to be announced in a special leaflet in the name of two or three Babbars.
- (viii) While the members were forbidden to touch the belongings of innocent persons, it was considered legitimate to loot the property of the Government, the toadies and notorious money-lenders. All the wealth thus collected was to go to the Jathas' common fund for the purchase of arms and was not to be used for meeting the personal needs of members.<sup>20</sup>

After giving detailed rules and chalking out careful plans, the Babbars were asked to start their work of 'reform'. As decided earlier at the meeting at Jassowal on 25 December, an attempt was made on the life of Arjan Singh, *Patwari* of Haripur, for his alleged help in the arrest of Master Mota Singh, but the attempt failed. Consequently, the first actual victim of the Babbars was Bishan Singh, a retired official of the Canal Department, who was shot dead on 10 February 1923.<sup>21</sup>

The murder of Zaildar Bishan Singh and the reported decision of the Babbars to launch a programme of wholesale



slaughter of toadies greatly alarmed the authorities. Besides sending more spies to the villages and reassuring the loyal elements of full official support, the Government also announced rewards for the arrest of Babbar leaders.<sup>22</sup> Villagers believed to be sympathetic to the Babbar cause were intimidated and harassed. *Lambardars* were asked to inform the police immediately in case they came across a Babbar or learnt of his whereabouts.<sup>23</sup> With a view to counteracting the Babbar propaganda in the villages, Peace Councils and Sudhar Committees, composed of the *Lambardars*, *Sufedposhes*, *Zaildars*, etc., were organised. These committees pointed to the villagers the blessings of the British rule in the Panjab and described the British as having been specially blessed by the Sikh Gurus.<sup>24</sup> These associations further exhorted the villagers not to trust the Babbar propaganda and asked them to help the Government in effecting their arrests.<sup>25</sup>

The official measures against the Babbars and the subsequent arrests of some of the important organisers of the movement including Jathedar Kishan Singh, Master Mota Singh and Sunder Singh through betrayal by their relations or through information supplied by informers, seem to have actuated the rest of the Babbars to step up their programme of killing those responsible for the arrest of their leaders. There followed a series of assassinations. On 11 March 1923, Buta Singh Lambardar and his grandson were murdered in villages Nangal Shaman of Jullundur district. On 19 March Labh Singh, an *ex-mistri* of the Police Training School, Phillaur was shot dead in the Hoshiarpur district for his alleged help in the arrest of Jathedar Kishan Singh.<sup>26</sup> On 22 March the Babbars issued an open letter addressed to the Governor in which they claimed the credit for these assassinations and threatened that other toadies would also meet the same fate.<sup>27</sup> Early in the morning of 27 March, Hazara Singh of Hoshirpur district was killed. On 17 April, ex-Subedar Gainda Singh was shot dead in front of his house in Ghurial village for his active assistance to the police in the arrest of certain Babbars. On 27 May, Chaudhri Ralla Ram and his brother Ditta were killed in the Kaulgarh village in the Hoshiarpur district.<sup>28</sup>

The quick succession of murders created panic among the



toadies and unnerved the authorities. The official account admitted that 'a number of village officials and other loyalists were in fear for their lives and many of them expressed anxiety to resign their posts'.<sup>29</sup>

On the advice of the Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur the D.I.G. of Police deputed Khan Bahadur Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Superintendent of Police, C.I.D., to work in liaison with the Jullundur police and help control the situation in the area. In the report that Abdul Aziz sent to D.I.G., C.I.D., he furnished a detailed account of the assassinations committed by the Babbars and repeatedly pointed to the panic they had created in the villages. While commenting on the killing of Ralla and Ditta, he wrote:

The most surprising fact in the outrage is that while the culprits stayed for about 1½ hours and in the early part of the night when the whole village comprising of about 100 houses was awake, not a single man came forward to the rescue of the victims, the neighbours shutting themselves in the houses. This was, I believe, due to the panic which had been created by the appearance of the desperate and notorious gang, some of whom were armed with fire-arms.<sup>30</sup>

The Government then took certain special measures to meet the Babbar challenge and to restore confidence among the loyalist elements in the affected areas. Special C.I.D. staff was deputed to assist the local police in their efforts to arrest the Babbar leaders. In addition to the investigating staff, a force of 50 regular police was moved to Jullundur, and the enrolment of a special force of 150 including 50 mounted men, was sanctioned. The police was supported and assisted by a military force of 250 Indian infantry and a squadron of the armoured cars. Aeroplanes were also flown occasionally over the affected areas scattering leaflets in order to restore confidence among the loyalist elements in the countryside. The Babbar Jathas were proclaimed an 'unlawful association' under the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 1908.<sup>31</sup>

For ensuring quick arrests of the Babbar leaders, handsome rewards were announced and their relations were



promised jagirs and cash prizes if they provided useful information. With the cooperation of their relatives some weak Babbars were also seduced to act as approvers and informers on their leaders. The case of Anup Singh was one important instance of such a betrayal and is worth describing in detail.

On 31 August 1923, Karam Singh, Udai Singh, Bishan Singh and Anup Singh were travelling from village Domeli to Bubeli and were to stay at the latter till the afternoon. Anup Singh managed to inform the police and destroy the party's ammunition with the exception of a gun which Karam Singh carried with him.<sup>12</sup> On receiving the information the police proceeded to the spot. The Babbars, on noticing the police, rushed towards a Gurdwara across a small stream. Mr. Smith, the Superintendent of Police, who wanted to arrest the Babbars alive, tried to persuade them to surrender, but they refused to do so. Karam Singh, the only one with a gun, continued firing in order to keep the policemen at bay. As they entered the stream, the police opened fire and Karam Singh, Udai Singh, Mohinder Singh and Bishan Singh were seriously wounded.<sup>13</sup>

Dhanna Singh, another important Babbar leader, was similarly betrayed by one of his associates, Jawala Singh. Dhanna Singh who was sent to the village of Jawala Singh on 24 October 1923 to enquire about another Babbar leader, Dalip Singh Dhamia, decided to spend the night at Jawala Singh's place. When Dhanna Singh was fast asleep, Jawala Singh first damaged his weapons and then informed the police.<sup>14</sup> Mr. Horton, Superintendent of Police, Hoshiarpur, accompanied by Mr. Jenkin, Assistant Superintendent of Police and a mixed guard numbering 38 officers and men, reached the spot at midnight of 25 October, 1923.<sup>15</sup> The house was surrounded and a party detailed to force open the front door. After a long struggle; Dhanna Singh was arrested and handcuffed. He was about to be searched when he made a violent jerk with his hands and exploded a bomb which he was carrying in his pocket. Dhanna Singh's right side was blown away and he died instantaneously. Of the police men standing around him, five were killed and another later died in the hospital. Mr. A.F. Horton, and Mr. W.N.P. Jenkin, along with four inspectors were severely injured. Later,



Mr. Horton died of internal haemorrhage on the morning of 3 November 1923.<sup>36</sup>

Undeterred by the arrests and deaths of their important leaders, the Babbars continued their programme of killing the supporters of the bureaucracy. They also continued their earlier programme of preaching hatred for the British rule through press and platform and inciting the people to violence. In the official measures of repression in the Doaba for sympathy with the Babbar cause, they found an argument to preach against inefficacy of the peaceful methods of the Akali leadership. Their paper incited the soldiers to murder their officers and called upon the people generally to kill the foreigners and establish a free Government.<sup>37</sup>

The threats made by the Babbar paper and numerous murders of toadies and Government officials caused considerable anxiety in official circles in London. Questions began to be raised by Members of the British Parliament about the deteriorating condition of law and order in the Panjab. The Government of the Panjab was criticised on the grounds that it was attaching too little importance to the movement and was reducing the strength of the police without good reasons.<sup>38</sup> Fears were also expressed about the safety of the British officials in India.

On 4 June 1923, Sir C. Yates drew the attention of the House of Commons to the Babbar programme of murdering all officers and killing every foreigner and wanted the Government to make a statement on the situation in the Panjab.<sup>39</sup> Again on 14 June 1923 a motion was tabled in the British Parliament about the seriousness of the Babbar Akali Movement.<sup>40</sup> But as the Secretary of State for India did not have sufficient information except that which was contained in the fortnightly reports on the situation in the Panjab sent to the authorities in London, he shelved the issue on the plea that since the activities of the Babbars, formed the basis of judicial proceedings against them it was not advisable to make a statement on the subject.<sup>41</sup> He also tried to allay the fears of the members about the safety of Europeans in the Panjab by quoting a letter from the Panjab Government in which different measures against the Babbars had been detailed.<sup>42</sup> In the meantime, he addressed an urgent telegram to the Government



of India asking for a detailed history of the movement and suggesting more active steps to meet the Babbar challenge.<sup>43</sup>

The Panjab Government then adopted more stringent measures against the movement. Important Babbar hide-outs were located and raided. Simultaneously raids were carried out at Pandori Nijran, Kishanpur, Jassowal, Paragpur, Kot Fatuhi and Daulatpur.<sup>44</sup> As a result 186 arrests were made including those of 25 persons suspected of complicity in murders. On the basis of the statements of the arrested Babbars as also the information supplied by those who had turned approvers, the police were able to trace and arrest the remaining Babbar leaders including Babu Santa Singh and Dalip Singh Dhamia.<sup>45</sup> On the basis of the documents recovered from the arrested Babbars their cyclostyling machine was also confiscated. Thus by mid June 1924 all the important Babbars had either been killed in police encounters or taken prisoners and the situation in the province brought under control.<sup>46</sup>

The Akali leadership and the national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi had not approved of the Babbar programme of violence and the secret murders of supporters of the Government. The S.G.P.C. had issued communiques exhorting the Sikhs to dissociate themselves with the activities of the Babbars as their programme clashed with the decided policy of peaceful agitation. Mahatma Gandhi, who did not approve at all of the revolutionary methods, had described these revolutionaries as 'misguided patriots', and emphasised that the secret murders committed by them were not acts of heroism.<sup>47</sup> This stand of the Akali and the nationalist leaders encouraged the British Government in its policy of repression of the Babbars and execution of their leaders. Some of the Babbar leaders alleged that the Akali leadership had struck a bargain with the Government, and in order to secure the release of the Akali prisoners it had allowed the Government a free hand in the matter of Babbar trials, sentences and execution. Master Mota Singh and Nau Jawan Sabha, therefore, charged the S.G.P.C. with 'giving a green signal to the Panjab Government for the execution of the Babbar Akalis'.<sup>48</sup>

The Babbars claim to have paid more attention to propaganda than had the Ghadrites whose movement had failed for



want of necessary awakening among the masses in favour of a revolutionary programme. Through the medium of religious Diwans and cyclostyled leaflets they tried to enlist the support of the village peasantry for their cause who formed the majority of the participants in the Babbar movement. The movement was greatly sustained by the hatred among Sikh peasantry for British imperialism and its supporters. Babbar attacks on the money-lenders also explain their economic grievances and their contempt for this class which had been exploiting them to an equal extent. But their vision seems to have been limited. Instead of murdering a few *Zaildars*, *Lambardars*, police-informers and money-lenders and thus limiting the scope of their revolutionary programme, they could have fared much better if they had organised the peasantry on the basis of their economic grievances against the feudal system and its prompter—the British Government—and thus built a stronger and wider democratic front against British imperialism in India.

Though the Akali leadership disowned both the Babbars as also their methods and went even to the extent of passing formal resolutions against them, the Babbars' contribution to the Akali Movement cannot be ignored. They increased the bargaining power of the Akali leadership by terrorising the bureaucratic machinery and its supporters in the Panjab and thus compelling the Government to come to terms with them. The Babbars equally contributed towards the weakening of the opposition by vested interests in the villages to the Akali Movement by announcing their plan of murdering all those responsible for the Nankana tragedy and by actually assassinating some of the loyalists who had helped the authorities in the province.

The Akali struggle being over, the militant elements among the Sikh community found expression through such organisations as the Nau-Jawan Sabha organised by Bhagat Singh and Kirti Kisan Party organised by Sohan Singh Josh and others with leftist leanings. It is worth noting that the Doaba area, particularly the Hoshiarpur district, has always been active in militant activities. It was this area to which belong most of the Ghadari Babas, the Babbar Akalis and now it is this area which has become active centre of extre-



mist activities in the recent political developments in Panjab. However the major point of difference between the militants of the past and their present expression is that while in the past they were moved by the lofty ideals of liberating their country, today they are playing in the hands of others and thus endangering the independence and integrity of their motherland which was liberated by the sufferings and sacrifices of their precursors. And again killing innocent civilian population, including women and children, are in no way acts of heroism and do not have any moral or religious sanction in any tradition much less in the order of the Khalsa which was created to defend the weak and helpless.



## 8

### THE GURDWARA LEGISLATION

The Panjab Government's policy with regard to legislative measures for the control of the Sikh shrines has at least four marked phases. The first phase begins with the commencement of the movement of reform and covers incidents prior to the tragedy at Nankana. In the first place, the Government seems to have failed to realise the magnitude of the problem; and consciously or unconsciously, chose to adopt a policy of non-interference. This is the impression given by a study of the lengthy correspondence between the Government of India (in the Home Political Department) and the Government of the Panjab with regard to their policy towards the Akali Movement.<sup>1</sup> When the Viceroy of India called for an explanation from the Panjab Government for its failure to intervene in the Nankana affair and to avert the tragedy that followed, the Panjab Government tried to defend its stand on the plea that intervention in the religious affairs of a 'sensitive community' was undesirable. This attitude of the Panjab Government was further explained by Sir John Maynard in a note dated 15 January 1921<sup>2</sup> in which he stated that the question was one between the persons claiming, and the persons having the possession. The Government, according to him, did not accept the 'responsibility of maintaining the *status quo*'.<sup>3</sup>

In the earlier stages of reform, the Government was anxious to avoid doing anything 'which might drive the Sikhs generally, who had as a body behaved most loyally during the war, into anything like opposition to the Government'.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the fear that the loyal Sikhs might be driven away, there



were other factors at the national level which compelled the Government to adopt such an attitude. Important sections of the Hindu and Muslim communities in the Panjab had united in a strong opposition to the Government. The Khilafat question had alienated Muslim support from the Government and the Panjab had favourably responded to the non-violent non-cooperation call of Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>5</sup>

As for Sikh politics, the extremists, who dominated the newly formed Central Sikh League, were in favour of a union with the Congress and Khilafat leaders over the issue of non-cooperation and passed a formal resolution pledging their support to the movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>6</sup> At this juncture the Panjab Government could ill-afford to alienate the moderate leadership of the Sikh community which had been its consistent supporter. Again, for similar reasons, the authorities did not make any attempt to restore the *status quo* disturbed by the reformers when they took possession of the Akal Takhat Bunga (Amritsar), Babe-di-Ber, Sialkot, Panja Sahib at Hasan Abdal, Sacha Sauda at Sheikhpura, Chola Sahib in Amritsar district and various other Gurdwaras.

It was only after the Akali Jathas' attempts to take possession of the Durbar Sahib, Tarn Taran, and consequent bloodshed there that a reassessment of the policy was undertaken by the Government. The Nankana tragedy was an eye-opener for the authorities at all levels. The failure of the local officials to take necessary measures to prevent the deplorable loss of life was a subject of censure in the Home-Political Department of the Government of India. Criticism of the Panjab officials by the Government of India and also the native press made the Panjab Government hypersensitive to the question and issues highlighted by the tragedy. The Government began to realise that it could no longer keep quiet and neutral in what it had so far believed to be a religious affair of a sensitive community. From this point onward a marked change is noticeable in the Panjab Government's policy towards the Akali Movement and with this begins the second phase.

In the second phase, we notice a desire on the part of the Panjab Government to produce an immediate legislative measure to solve the outstanding disputes and to check the



growing unrest among the Sikh masses in general and the Sikh soldiers in particular over the issue of Gurdwara reform. Realising that the enactment of a formal legislation on the issue would take a long time and the need for reform was urgent, the Government tried to meet the emergent situation by issuing an Ordinance in March, 1921.<sup>7</sup> The Ordinance provided a three-man Judicial Commission which was to take charge of all cases of disputes in Gurdwara management. However, this measure failed to check the growing political unrest in the province. With a view to checking this unrest and to bring the situation back to normal an effort was made in April 1921 to prepare a draft of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill in consultation with the leading members of the Sikh community. This measure was introduced in the Panjab Legislative Council on 5 April 1921, and was referred to a Select Committee.<sup>8</sup> However, when the Bill was again presented in the Council in September 1921, after its approval by the Select Committee, the Sikh Members of the Council did not support the measure. In the face of such a degree of opposition the Government could not proceed with the passage of the Bill and this much-advertised and widely discussed Bill was dropped finally on 10 November 1921.<sup>9</sup>

As the tempo of reform was building up and the Government saw no way out of the impasse, feelers continued to be put out among the Sikh Members of the Council to obtain some consensus before introducing a new Bill. This resulted in two more attempts at the Gurdwara Legislation.

During a year's interval between the lapse of the first Bill (November 1921) and the introduction of another (November 1922), the Government made further efforts to find a solution to the Sikh problem. The Panjab High Court, Lahore, instructed all Judicial Officers in the province to expedite pending cases of dispute over Gurdwara management,<sup>10</sup> Deputy Commissioners were also instructed to grant sanction in those cases wherein the party seeking reform wanted to institute proceedings to secure better management of the shrines.<sup>11</sup>

This change in the official attitude led to the moderates extending their cooperation to the Government to get their grievances redressed through legal means. The Mahants also



adopted a more reasonable line of action on realising that the authorities could no longer help them retain their hereditary positions in the face of popular opposition. In more than 15 cases the Mahants agreed to the transfer of property in the name of the concerned Gurdwaras.<sup>12</sup>

These, however, were measures of interim relief and did not provide any lasting and satisfactory solution to the gigantic problem of Gurdwara reform. The measures failed to convince the reformers that the Government wanted to help them achieve their object. When the Government realised that promises of 'sympathetic consideration' and their policy of winning over the moderates by small concessions had failed to check the popular movement and that there were fears of the Sikh units also being affected, the Viceroy of India advised the authorities in the Panjab to take the boldest step of offering a permanent settlement of this religious question by means of a Gurdwara Bill. Accordingly the Panjab Government came forward with another Bill in November 1922.

The new Bill was formally moved in the Panjab Legislative Council on 7 November 1922 and a Select Committee was appointed to go through its various provisions and to report by 11 November 1922. The Bill, as it emerged from the Select Committee, was an improvement upon the first one introduced in April 1921, as far as the personnel of the proposed Board were concerned—one representing the party of reform the other the party in possession and the third a European officer. Under the new Bill the Board was to consist of 4 members.<sup>13</sup> The reform party was to be represented by 2 members and could thus claim an upper hand. But this did not satisfy the reformers. Considering the anti-imperialistic character that the movement had acquired during the struggle, there was no room for a European member on the Commission. The number of the members was, therefore, reduced from 4 to 3, the European officer was eliminated and the reformist party given effective control.<sup>14</sup> Another important improvement in the Bill was that the cost of the Commission, unlike that of the previous one, was to be met from the provincial revenue. The Bill also tried to satisfy the opposition of the non-Sikhs by allaying their fears that some of their shrines might come under Akali control. The proposed Judicial Commission was



to take charge of all the disputed Gurdwaras pending final settlement of disputes.

However, improvements in the Bill in favour of the party of reform as also official anxiety to find a solution to the Sikh problem failed to impress the Akali leadership whose sights were fixed very high because of their triumphs in the 'Keys' Affair' and later in their struggle at Guru-ka-Bagh. Coupled with the fact that the Indian National Congress and other nationalist forces were backing it, the Akali leadership thought it better to continue the agitation hoping to win fresh victories against the authorities rather than to accept the Bill and put an end to a movement already growing from strength to strength. It was not surprising, therefore, that when the Bill was taken up for discussion in the Council, the Sikh Members opposed any move to legislate for the Gurdwaras. However, the Government got the measure through with the support of the Mohammadan and the official Members of the Council. Since the S.G.P.C. and the Sikh M.L.Cs. who were to nominate a representative each on the Gurdwara Tribunal provided by this Bill, refused to lend their cooperation, this Bill soon became a dead letter.

As time passed, the authorities in the Panjab and the higher officials in Delhi realised the extent of the futility of passing a Bill against the united opposition of the Hindu and Sikh Members of the Council. The measure, instead of solving the immediate problems which the Government faced, created fresh problems and the Akali agitation continued unabated. While the Government was contemplating alternative measures to contain the Akali agitation, there came a temporary lull as a result of the settlement of the dispute at Guru-ka-Bagh. During the lull, the Government found the much-needed time to reconsider its earlier policy with regard to the Akali Movement. It also believed that 'the longer the lull continues, the more difficult it would be for the S.G.P.C. to resuscitate the excitement prevalent during Guru-ka-Bagh episode'.<sup>15</sup> But the events that soon followed upset the official calculations. With the Akali leadership taking up the issue of the restoration of the Maharaja of Nabha to his throne, an agitational force much bigger than any in the past rose to break the temporary lull.<sup>16</sup>



Whether the restoration question was a religious issue or not, and whether the S.G.P.C. was competent to take up the matter are questions discussed in detail in the 'Nabha Affair'. The Akali involvement in the Nabha affair and consequent agitation diverted the main body of the Akali leadership from religion to politics. It was during their agitation at Nabha that the Akalis received increasing support from the Indian National Congress and other political organisations in the country. The agitation which was started for the restoration of the Maharaja became a much more complicated affair, when an Akhand Path arranged by the Akalis at Gurdwara Gangsar, Jaito (Nabha State) was allegedly interrupted by the State officials.<sup>17</sup> Taking it as an 'unprecedented' instance of insult to their religion, the Akalis used it to give to their movement a new lease of life.

The firing at the Shahidi Jatha at Jaito on 21 February 1924 further complicated the situation and the place became a fresh arena for the conflict between the entire official hierarchy from Nabha to London on the one hand, and the Akali leadership and other nationalist forces in the country on the other. The Government, after having made two unsuccessful attempts to find a legislative solution to the Sikh problem, thought it better to suppress the growing movement of non-cooperation in a native State with the help of native chiefs, the Sikh loyalists, the native army personnel and other native agencies. But when, even after they had filled all the jails with Akali agitators, the movement was proceeding unabated with no end in sight, they had no recourse but to reopen negotiations with the Akali leadership. At the same time, the Akalis, though apparently unaffected, were approaching the limit of their resources and were facing financial and other difficulties; they responded willingly to the official offer to negotiate.

It was in this climate of hope and compromise that an attempt was made by the authorities to normalise the relations between the Government and the Sikhs. At a suggestion from Sir Malcolm Hailey (the Home Member of the Council), the Viceroy, Lord Reading, invited General Sir William Birdwood, Commander-in-Chief, Northern Command, to negotiate with the Akali leadership on the question of Gurdwara legislation and the restoration of friendship between the Government and



the Sikhs.<sup>18</sup> With the help of Bhai Jodh Singh and Sardar Narain Singh, the General, entered into negotiations with the Panjab Government on the one hand and the Akali leaders in jail and at large on the other.

In the course of his meetings with different sections of the people concerned Birdwood found that it was a difficult task to bring different parties to a common platform. While the moderate Sikh leaders like Bhai Jodh Singh, Raja Singh and Risaldar Ranjodh Singh followed a policy of compromise and were willing to shelve some of the Sikh demands till a final solution of the problem emerged, the extremists, who actually dominated the Akali leadership, gave only conditional support to the Birdwood Committee. Thus, the Akali leadership, though willing to drop the Nabha issue, insisted on the unconditional completion of 101 Akhand Paths at Jaito and the unconditional release of all the Akali prisoners. The General argued that once the negotiations were successfully concluded the release of prisoners could be easily secured. As he could not give any definite assurance on the question of the release of all categories of prisoners and the unconditional holding of the Akhand Paths, and since the Akali leadership could not promise cooperation without prior acceptance of these demands, the negotiations ended in stalemate and the Birdwood Committee finally abandoned its efforts for a compromise on 2 June 1924.<sup>19</sup>

Writing 16 years later about the failure in his negotiations, Birdwood gave the following summary in his autobiography, *The Khaki and the Gown*:

The more extremist Akalis obstructed progress with quite unreasonable demands. They tried to make it a condition that, in addition to those detained for simple Gurdwara offences, all Sikhs undergoing imprisonment or awaiting trial—even for murder or manslaughter resulting from the seizure of Gurdwaras should be released before they would cooperate. To this stipulation it was, of course, quite impossible to agree, and after a whole month's discussion I had reluctantly to inform the Viceroy that the appointment of my Committee appeared to have been premature.<sup>20</sup>



But a careful perusal of the private papers of Malcolm Hailey shows that the uncompromising attitude of the extremists in the Akali leadership was not the only factor responsible for the failure of the negotiations. That the authorities were equally obdurate in the matter of the release of the Akali prisoners is clear from the following extract from Edward Maclagan's letter to Malcolm Hailey: 'My feeling throughout has been that the longer the leaders are in jail, the more reasonable will the attitude of the Akalis become and that if the leaders now under trial received sentences of a deterrent character, we might find the Sikh population much more ready to put forward reasonable terms. . . .'<sup>21</sup> Hailey, who supported Maclagan, replied: 'But I confess that it does not look to me as if the atmosphere will be ripe for such a settlement until we have hit the present leaders of the movement much harder than we have done so far; in fact until they feel themselves that the game is up.'<sup>22</sup>

It seems that equally responsible for the failure of the negotiations was the stiff posture adopted by the Panjab Government especially when Hailey succeeded as the Governor of the Panjab. Hailey who had all along been closely watching the developments in the Panjab as Home Member of the Viceroy's Council possessing an intimate knowledge of the Sikh mentality had a policy of his own towards the Akali Movement. Maclagan had granted several concessions to the Akalis, such as the unconditional release of the Akali prisoners during the earlier agitations over the 'Keys Affair' and Guruka-Bagh, only to find that each concession was interpreted by the Akali leadership as weakness and surrender by the authorities. Hailey, on the other hand, wanted a definite assurance of better behaviour and the creation of a suitable climate before he would agree to the release of prisoners or make any other concession. Before giving any assurance he wanted a formal declaration from the Akal Takhat or in some other equally formal manner that the Jathas were dissolved and would not be reorganised, that there was no further question at issue about Nabha and that religious funds were not to be used for political purposes with accounts being published of their actual use.<sup>23</sup>

While the Government tried to fix the blame for the failure



of the negotiations on "the uncompromising extremists", the Akali and the nationalist leadership accused the Panjab Government of having 'materially changed its policy during the course of the negotiations'.<sup>24</sup>

During the third phase—the period between the failure of the Birdwood negotiations in June 1924 and the passage of the final Bill in July 1925—the leadership and resources of the Akali Movement were under a severe strain as a result of the new policy of repression unleashed by Hailey. It was a well-planned and carefully executed policy of splitting the Akali leadership, separating the religious issues from the political ones, opening new fronts to divide the resources of the Akalis, alienating the Hindus and Muslims and also the moderate Sikhs from the Akali cause and organising anti-Akali associations to put forward counter-claims against the Akalis. On consulting a large number of now-available private and confidential letters exchanged between Hailey and the higher authorities in Delhi and London, we find that Hailey was not interested in negotiating with the Akali leadership till the whole Sikh attitude had been transformed and made more pliable. He felt that there had been too much inclination in the Panjab to let the Sikhs dictate terms and real peace was not possible till the Government was able to dictate terms to the Sikhs.<sup>25</sup>

In one of his letters to the higher authorities in London, Hailey summarised his new policy in the following manner:

I do not think that we can now gain any more by efforts at conciliation, for theirs is a peculiar mentality which will always take conciliation for weakness....<sup>26</sup>

For the purpose of strengthening the moderates against the extremists, Hailey encouraged the loyalist elements in the Sikh community to come out in open opposition to the Akali Movement. He instructed the district-level officials to organise Sudhar Committees in every district containing Sikhs. To coordinate the efforts of the various anti-Akali associations he helped form a central body—the Provincial Sudhar Committee—at Amritsar. These Committees consisted of the landed gentry, retired military officers and other title-holding



Sikhs.<sup>27</sup> Though ostensibly Hailey denied that the Sudhar Committees were officially sponsored bodies, in his private letters he made no secret of his support to these bodies. In one of his letters to the Viceroy, informing him of the 'good work being done by these associations', he wrote: 'I frankly confess that they owe their existence to our instigation, and continue it under our support. ...'<sup>28</sup> Hailey then tried further to weaken the Akali leadership by divorcing the religious from the political issues. He achieved this by opening fresh fronts for Akali agitation with the appointment of a Receiver for Nankana Sahib and with his refusal to renew the lease of the Guru-ka-Bagh land, thus challenging the Akali leadership to start fresh morchas on these two issues.<sup>29</sup> Hailey also persuaded the Viceroy not to negotiate directly with the nationalist leaders and Members of the Central Legislative Assembly on the question of the release of Akali prisoners or that of the legislation for the Sikh shrines.<sup>30</sup> Observing that the Akalis were showing signs of weakness and that those at large could not effectively organise the movement, Hailey made another clever move. He encouraged the officially sponsored Sudhar Committees to unite in promoting a Gurdwara Bill and to deprive the Akalis and their supporters of the main objective in continuing the agitation.<sup>31</sup>

At this critical juncture, national leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mohammed Ali Jinnah came to the rescue of the Akalis. Realizing that the new Governor was not prepared to negotiate with the Akali leadership or the nationalists and was cunningly encouraging the anti-Akali associations to draft a Bill on lines quite unfavourable to them, Pandit Malaviya tried to take the wind out of Hailey's sails by drafting a Bill of his own in consultation with the Akali leadership and by asking the Sikh Members of the Panjab Legislative Council to move the Bill and the Hindu Members to support it.<sup>32</sup> In case the introduction of his Bill was not allowed in the Panjab Legislative Council, Malaviya had up his sleeve the alternative of introducing it in the Central Legislative Assembly on the ground that there were Sikh shrines outside the Panjab also; and hence there was need for an all-India legislation on the subject.<sup>33</sup> Malaviya hoped



to get his Bill through with the support of the nationalist Members of the Assembly.

The moves of Malaviya and Jinnah seem to have compelled Hailey to change his earlier policy of allowing the movement to prolong itself indefinitely and not to compromise with the Akalis on the Gurdwara Bill issue. Thus, on the one hand, he tried to persuade the Viceroy and Members of his Council not to allow the nationalist leaders to negotiate on behalf of the Akali leadership, while on the other, he opened negotiations with the Sikh Members of the Panjab Legislative Council through H.W. Emerson and F.H. Puckle.<sup>34</sup> And with this starts the final phase.

It was under these circumstances that Sardar Tara Singh, a Sikh M.L.C. from Moga, was asked to introduce his Bill, the detailed provisions of which had been discussed both with the Akali leaders in the Lahore Fort Jail and the Government officials in Lahore and Delhi, before its introduction in the Panjab Legislative Council on 7 May 1925. The new measure was referred to a Select Committee which submitted its report on 20 June 1925.<sup>35</sup> After long and detailed discussions on each and every clause, the measure was unanimously adopted by the Council on 7 July 1925.

The Bill became an Act (Act VIII of 1925) when on 28 July 1925, it obtained formal assent of the Governor-General of India.<sup>36</sup> The Act came into force on 1 November 1925, with a Gazette Notification from the Government of the Panjab.<sup>37</sup>

After the acceptance of the Bill by the Akali leadership, the newly elected members of the Central Gurdwara Board met in the Town Hall, Amritsar, on 4 September 1926 where 14 names were added to the list of its members. The fully constituted Board held its first meeting on 2 October 1926 when after electing the Interim Committee, it was unanimously decided to name the new Board as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.<sup>38</sup> In the meantime, the Panjab Government also withdrew its earlier ban on the S.G.P.C. and the Shiromani Akali Dal and shortly afterwards by another notification recognised the newly formed S.G.P.C.<sup>39</sup>

The Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill was a unique piece of legislation with delicate checks and balances and inbuilt



provisions for decentralisation. Under the original Bill the S.G.P.C. was intended as an apex body and its role was only supervisory and financial resources limited. As a result, it did not attract politically ambitious people wanting to use this office to climb to political power. However, the position changed totally with new developments after independence. By a legislation an amendment was made to the original Act which provided direct S.G.P.C. control over all the historic shrines including the Golden Temple and Akal Takhat which were being earlier looked after by the local committees. Consequently influence of the S.G.P.C. in terms of political clout and financial resources greatly increased. This altered position with huge funds at the disposal of the President of the S.G.P.C., created a new situation with this body being described as a "state within the state" on the model of Vatican and its President being described as "the Pope of the Sikhs". There is no wonder then in politically ambitious people like Gurcharan Singh Tohra capturing and continuing their hold over this body to further their political ambitions. In order to further strengthen their position and augment the existing vast resources these leaders are now pressing for an All India Gurdwara Bill in the hope that all historic Gurdwaras in India and their income will come under the control of the existing S.G.P.C.



## 9

### IMPACT ON THE NATIONALIST POLITICS IN PANJAB

The religio-political struggle of the Akalis directed against the priests, mahants and other vested interests in the Sikh shrines, and consequently against the British imperialism, was one of the most powerful popular movements in modern India. Of all the movements in the Panjab, the Akalis' was, perhaps, the most popular, the biggest and the strongest, with a broad base and active mass participation. In the short span of five years more than 30,000 men and women were jailed, 400 died for the cause, and 2,000 were wounded, and a large number suffered dismissal from service, withdrawal of jagirs and pensions, imposition of fines, forfeiture of property and various other forms of punishment. The recruitment of Sikhs into the army and other services under the British Government was suspended for some time. A large number of Sikh soldiers were court-martialled for wearing *kirpans* and black turbans—thus expressing their sympathy with the Akali Movement. The editors, printers and publishers of Akali and pro-Akali papers were fined or imprisoned, their securities forfeited and their publications banned. Villages which had shown a marked sympathy for the movement were specially punished and recruitment of their inhabitants to the army and other services stopped.

In return for the large-scale sufferings and sacrifices, the Akali Movement secured to the Sikhs, in the form of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Act, an undisputed and exclusive control over the historic Sikh shrines. The movement also



secured to the Sikhs a system of gurdwara elections conducted under the supervision of the government to form managing bodies for their places of religious importance. The system of gurdwara elections was, and continues to be, a unique feature, because no other social or religious group anywhere in the world seems to exercise a similar privilege of directly electing the managing bodies of their religious places.

The Akali Movement, though itself a product of the general awakening and growing political consciousness in the country, seems to have greatly strengthened the forces of nationalism in the Punjab by rejecting the Mahants, the landed aristocracy and other pro-British and vested interests in the Sikh community who had been declared the 'natural leaders' of the Sikhs by the official machinery. The movement provided the Sikh community with a new type of middle-class nationalist leadership, consisting of barristers, vakils, school and college teachers and retired military officers. This new leadership, instead of playing into the hands of the British officials as the previous leadership of the Chief Khalsa Diwan had done, preferred to join the mainstream of nationalism in the country. It was not surprising, therefore, to find a majority of the Akali leaders turning from the original Akali programme of Gurdwara reform and linking it with the movement of non-cooperation launched by Mahatma Gandhi and the larger programme of the country's struggle for freedom. It was mainly due to the emergence of this new type of leadership that the Akalis could secure the active sympathy and support of the Indian National Congress and other nationalist forces in the country in their own struggle against British imperialism in the Punjab.

It was mainly due to the Akali-Congress association during the Akali Movement that the two leaderships came closer to each other and that the Sikhs became inextricably involved in Congress activities. Actually the two groups among the Sikhs—(i) the Akali advocates of purely religious reform, and (ii) others who looked upon the Gurdwara reform only as a part of the larger programme of the country's freedom—remained united till 1939, initially under the leadership of Baba Kharak Singh and later that of Master Tara Singh.

In the Akali Movement, the Congress found an opportunity



to further its own programme of the non-cooperation launched by Mahatma Gandhi and to strengthen its position in Punjab. By winning over the Akali leadership they were able to influence a large section of the Sikh masses who had till then remained aloof from the Congress programme. As Maulana Mohamed Ali remarked in the course of his presidential address at the Cocanada Session of the Indian National Congress on 31 December 1923: 'A better opportunity for civil disobedience at least on a provincial scale never presented itself since the arrest of the Mahatma.'<sup>2</sup>

To give moral support to the Akalis in their non-violent struggle against the government, the Congress leadership passed formal resolutions supporting them in whatever they did. An attack on the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal was described by the Congress as a direct challenge to the right of free association of all Indians and a blow aimed at all movements for freedom. Dr. Kitchlew, the convener of the Satyagraha Committee, emphasized that 'the Akali struggle was now a national struggle and defeat of the Akalis for want of help from the Congress would affect the national assembly'. The Akalis were also eulogized as 'the only living wing of the national movement' and 'the strongest community in India because of the Triumph of Satyagraha of which they had given full proof'.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from passing formal resolutions lending them moral support, the Congress leadership also rendered the Akalis solid practical help by sending Congress volunteers to assist them in their publicity work. An Akali-Sahayik Bureau was set up at Amritsar to co-ordinate the Akali-Congress activities and to help the Akalis organize their propaganda machinery. Almost all important national leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Mohamed Ali and Hakim Ajmal Khan personally visited Nanakana, Amritsar, Guru-ka-Bagh and other places of Akali activity to obtain first-hand information about the events and to help the Akalis by giving advice and moral support. In the special session of the Congress held at Delhi in September 1923, a resolution was passed, supporting the Akali agitation in the Sikh State of Nabha and it was also decided to send Congress observers to get first-hand informa-



tion about developments there. Jawaharlal Nehru, A.T. Gidwani and K. Santhanam, who were sent there for the purpose, were arrested as soon as they entered the state territory and put behind the bars for having entered the State without prior permission of the British Administrator of Nabha. During their stay in Nabha Jail and their subsequent trials, the Congress observers not only gained first-hand knowledge about the Akali cause and the genuineness of their sufferings but also got a chance to observe the high-handedness of bureaucracy and the arbitrary nature of justice in the Sikh State of Nabha, then put under the control of a British Administrator. In a long hand-written statement, choked with emotion and highly appreciative of the Akalis, Nehru attacked the British Administration of Nabha and the judicial machinery in the State for their 'unscrupulous and crooked ways'. Having gained first-hand impressions about the Akalis, Nehru became their great admirer and wished to prove 'worthy of their high tradition and fine courage'. The last paragraph of his original statement drafted in the Nabha Jail on November 1923, reads:

I was in jail when the Guru-ka-Bagh struggle was gallantly fought and won by the Sikhs. I marvelled at the courage and sacrifice of the Akalis and wished that I could be given an opportunity of showing my deep admiration of them by some form of service. That opportunity has now been given to me and I earnestly hope that I shall prove worthy of their high tradition and fine courage. *Sat Sri Akal.*<sup>4</sup>

In return for the help extended to the Akali Movement, the Congress leadership was able to establish a good deal of influence with the Akali leaders and through them the Congress programme was carried to the Sikh masses. It was mainly due to the nationalist influence upon the Akali leadership that the SGPC was able to adopt non-violent non-cooperation as a weapon with which to fight the powerful bureaucracy in Panjab and to broaden the scope of their earlier programme of gurdwara reform. A formal resolution in favour of non-cooperation and passive resistance was



passed by the SGPC on 11 May 1921. Resolutions were also passed at this meeting to boycott liquor and foreign goods and to substitute panchayats for courts of law.

With the election of Sardar Kharak Singh, a professed non-cooperator and a die-hard nationalist, as president of the newly elected SGPC in July 1921, and the formation of a new executive committee consisting of extremists and non-cooperators, the movement of non-cooperation in the Panjab was further strengthened. This new element in the Akali leadership, to whom the cause of religious reform differed little from extreme nationalism, was able to introduce national politics into the movement for gurdwara reform and thereby broaden the scope of the Akali movement.

Perusal of the court proceedings against some of the prominent Akali leaders shows that the ideology of non-cooperation had taken deep root among them. Most of them did not defend themselves in the courts. During interrogation they neither admitted nor denied the official charges against them. Whatever they said in the court was not by way of defence but to tell the official machinery that as non-cooperators they had no regard for the British judicial system which they considered arbitrary and biased. The following extract from Baba Kharak Singh's speech in the court serves as an example: 'As the Government is a party to this prosecution and the Judge is one of its servants, I, therefore do not wish to make any statement. My position as President of the Sikh Panth is like that of the President of the United States, France and Germany.'<sup>5</sup>

A strong link and reciprocal relationship had thus been established between the two movements. The Akali Movement became a part of the national movement—in effect a manifestation of the Congress programme of non-cooperation at the provincial level—and in return received active sympathy and support from the Congress leadership in its struggle against the government. Growing Akali-Congress liaison is evident from the fact that while in 1919 there was not a single Sikh on the AICC, in 1920 there were two and in 1922 nine Sikhs on the AICC.<sup>6</sup>

The Akali Movement also clearly demonstrated the efficacy of the doctrine of non-violent non-cooperation when the Akalis



in the Panjab were able by peaceful means to dislodge the Mahants from their hereditary positions in the Sikh shrines, and the government from its unreasonable stand. The *Akali-te-Paradesi* summarized in the following manner the Akali contribution towards the strengthening of the force of nationalism:

The Akalis have shown to the Indians how a most arrogant, oppressive, cunning and deceitful bureaucracy can be brought to its knees by means of non-violent Satyagraha. By sacrifices at Guru-ka-Bagh, they have destroyed the prestige of the bureaucracy and raised the dignity of India.<sup>7</sup>

Akali-Congress comradeship forged during the Akali struggle (1920-25) greatly influenced Sikh nationalist politics in the years that followed. A perusal of the later period shows that in spite of difference of opinion on certain issues, like the Nehru Report and Sikh recruitment to the army during the Second World War, by and large, a majority of the Sikh leadership went with the Congress on various crucial matters concerning the future of India.

Growing nationalist influence on Sikh politics is evident from the fact that the Central Sikh League,<sup>8</sup> which was formed to fight for political rights of the Sikhs with Congress help and guidance, time and again opposed communal representation in Panjab as well as in the rest of the country. As early as 1923 the Central Sikh League had passed a resolution condemning British attempts to divide various communities in India by introducing a system of representation on communal lines. The resolution called upon the Sikhs and other minorities to give up communal representation in the best interest of the country.<sup>9</sup> Nationalist Sikhs like Baba Gurdit Singh and Sardul Singh Caveeshar were convinced that communal representation had harmed the Sikhs more than it safeguarded their interests. According to Caveeshar, communal representation was at the bottom of all communal riots and was devised by the British authorities to perpetuate their rule by dividing people in India on communal lines.<sup>10</sup> These leaders reiterated their stand again in 1926 and argued that the Sikh League was brought



into existence not to beg for concessions like the pro-British vested interests among the Sikhs. They were for the Sikhs getting their rights by making sacrifices for swaraj in close co-operation with the Congress. The Congress reciprocated the Central Sikh League's gesture by promising the same treatment to the Sikhs in Panjab as was to be offered to the Muslim minorities in other provinces. At its Bombay session 15-18 May 1927 the AICC passed the following resolution in this connection: 'Provided that reciprocal concessions in favour of minorities including the Sikhs in the Punjab may be made by mutual agreement so as to give them representation in excess of the proportion of the number of seats to which they would be entitled on the population basis in any province or provinces. . .'<sup>11</sup>

When the Simon Commission visited India, an all-parties Sikh Conference was convened at Amritsar on 30 January 1928 to clarify the Sikh attitude towards the Commission. The Conference, attended among others by such prominent leaders as Baba Kharak Singh and Sardar Mangal Singh, decided that the Sikhs should boycott the Commission as advised by the Indian National Congress, and appealed to the Sikh community to join the *hartal* on 3 February 1928 when the Commission was to land in Bombay.<sup>12</sup> Again when the Indian National Congress decided to call an All Parties Conference at Delhi to draft a swarajya constitution, the Central Sikh League decided to join the conference and help the nationalist leadership find an agreed solution to the problem of communal representation. Knowing fully well that abolition of communal representation was not in their immediate interest, the Sikh representatives gave a proof of their nationalist feeling by declaring that their community was 'prepared to accept representation on non-communal basis and this proves that they are particularly prepared to make sacrifices for national welfare and advancement'.<sup>13</sup> Mangal Singh, the Sikh representative on the Nehru Committee signed the Nehru Report knowing fully well that the final recommendations of the Committee were not acceptable to the majority of his Sikh compatriots. In his support to the Nehru Report, Mangal Singh was joined by other Sikh nationalists like Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Amar Singh Jhabal, Baba Gurdit Singh, Giani



Hira Singh Dard, Sarmukh Singh Jhabbal, Giani Kartar Singh and others of their way of thinking. Though Master Tara Singh did not agree with Mangal Singh's stand on the Nehru Report he did not favour a boycott of the Congress as was being advocated by a section of the Sikh leadership, interestingly, led by Baba Kharak Singh. In the course of his presidential address at the annual session of the Central Sikh League held in October 1929 at Lyallpur, Master Tara Singh said, 'We cannot boycott the Congress permanently, we are born to fight for freedom and we cannot stand aloof from an organisation whose sole object is such a fight.'<sup>14</sup> Exhorting the Sikhs to be firm in the fight for freedom, he said:

I would not mind if you, instead of standing with the Congress, boycott it and stand in front of it in the fight for freedom. But if you boycott the Congress and stand in the back lines, it will be a matter of shame for our community. Those who are for boycotting the Congress must devise some positive fighting programme, and I am sure all the people will be with them. But if you simply pass a resolution to boycott the Congress and oppose whatever the Congress does, you will be caught in the trap of bureaucracy. Some, tired of our inactivity, may rejoin the Congress; the rest may die their natural death. I beseech you to be very cautious when considering this question. On the other hand, if we go on working with the Congress as before, our attitude may be misunderstood and we may not be considered earnest in our demands. This is also dangerous, and we have to chalk out a *via media*. It is not difficult to chart a safe course if you gentlemen consider unity to be the chief need of the time.<sup>15</sup>

Baba Kharak Singh, who did not agree with the Nehru Report for having accepted dominion status instead of *purna swaraj*, was persuaded by his lieutenants to sink his differences and support the Congress during the crucial Lahore Session of 1929. The Lahore Session in December 1929 was a momentous one. It passed the historic resolution demanding complete independence and declaring that the word *Swarajya* in Article I of the Congress constitution meant 'complete independence',



and that the 'entire scheme of the Nehru Committee Report should be considered to have lapsed'.<sup>16</sup> To make its policy as consistent as possible with the change in its creed, the Congress resolved upon complete boycott of the central and provincial legislatures and committees constituted by the government. It called upon Congressmen and other freedom fighters to abstain from participating directly or indirectly in elections, and directed Congress members of the legislatures and committees to resign their seats forthwith. It further appealed to the nation to prosecute zealously the constructive programme of the Congress, and authorized the AICC, whenever it deemed fit, to launch a programme of civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes.

By another resolution the Congress declared that in view of the lapse of the Nehru Report it was necessary to reaffirm its policy on the communal question, for in independent India it could be solved on strictly national lines:

But as the Sikhs in particular, and the Muslims and other minorities in general, had expressed dissatisfaction at the solution of the communal question proposed in the Nehru Report, the Congress assures the Sikhs, Muslims and other minorities that no solution thereof in any future constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that does not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned.<sup>17</sup>

During the session, Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Dr. Ansari and some other members of the Congress Working Committee met Baba Kharak Singh to know his mind. The Baba told them that he wanted the Congress to declare in unequivocal words its goal of complete independence. To this Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders gladly agreed.

The Congress leaders also solved the crucial question of equal and fair treatment to the all minorities by drafting a resolution in the presence of Baba Kharak Singh. The resolution stated that the Congress would not accept any constitution which did not give equal and fair treatment to all minorities, particularly the Sikhs. Thus, the main points of difference between the Congress and Baba Kharak Singh were amicably



resolved. To demonstrate their unity and solidarity with the Indian National Congress an All India Sikh Conference was organized to coincide with the Congress Session at Lahore. In a fiery speech Baba Kharak Singh, who was elected President of the Conference, reiterated that he and his community were prepared to shed the last drop of their blood for the freedom of the motherland. In the course of a long speech he said:

In the fight for India's freedom if you find a bullet in my back do not count me as one amongst the Sikhs of the Gurus and do not cremate my dead body according to Sikh rites. A disciple of the Great Gurus is an ideal saint-soldier and is supposed to fight in the vanguard and face the bullet in the chest and not in the back. We, the Sikh, shall never allow any foreigner to rule our Motherland and we shall brook no injustice.<sup>18</sup>

Master Tara Singh, President of the Central Sikh League and Vice-President of the SGPC, felt satisfied with the resolution passed by the Lahore session. He said:

There were people who were trying to lead the Sikhs into the bureaucratic snare. Congress leaders have risen to the occasion and acted like statesmen. Mahatma Gandhi is to be congratulated, for it is he who is mainly responsible for this resolution. I am sure that the Congress will gather great strength and a wave of enthusiasm will sweep the Sikhs.<sup>19</sup>

When the Congress launched the Civil Disobedience Movement the Sikh leadership again joined hands with the nationalist forces in ensuring the success of the Congress call. On 9 March 1930, the Shiromani Akali Dal offered 5,000 volunteers for the movement.<sup>20</sup> It also called upon all Sikhs to do their duty in this critical hour and rally under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi without being mindful of the fact that the Sikh colour had not been included in the national flag in spite of Gandhiji's assurance. Stating further that to keep aloof from the struggle was not in keeping with the noble



traditions of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Akali Dal advised the Sikhs to join the struggle.

The Provincial Congress Committee reciprocated the gesture of the Akali leadership by nominating Master Tara Singh as a member of the 'War Council' to co-ordinate the Civil Disobedience Movement in the province. On the arrest of Dr. Saif-ud-din Kitchlew, Master Tara Singh replaced him as 'Dictator' on this body. When in the heat of the Civil Disobedience Movement shooting took place in the North West Frontier Province, it stirred Master Tara Singh to the depth of his soul. He declared:

The Sikhs, in sympathy with their tyrannised countrymen, will shed their blood at the same place where the Pathans have shed it. It is said that the Sikhs and Pathans are each other's enemies. That is absolutely wrong. The Sikhs and Pathans are sons of the same Motherland, and if any such impression prevails that they are enemies, the Sikhs will wash it off by mingling their blood with that of the Pathans. The Sikhs must, therefore, go to their rescue and lay down their lives and do their duty honourably as enjoined upon them by their Gurus.<sup>21</sup>

He made this declaration at Jallianwala Bagh before a huge gathering. One hundred fearless Akalis volunteered to march to Peshawar, each fully determined to lay down his life for the country. It was like an army of dedicated martyrs. The jatha was stopped by the police at Dina, near Jhelum, and mercilessly lathi-charged till every member became unconscious. Master Tara Singh had been arrested while the jatha was still in Lahore and imprisoned at Gujarat.

Jaswant Singh led a Jatha of 100 Sikhs to break salt laws and was arrested along with members of his jatha. A large number of Sikhs from various parts of the province came out to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. According to contemporary sources, out of 7,000 satyagrahis who were convicted in Punjab in connection with the movement, 3,000 were the Sikhs.<sup>22</sup> In the words of Lala Duni Chand, a prominent Congress leader in Punjab, 'the Sikh community has perhaps sent proportionately the largest number to jail and



has made glorious sacrifices'.<sup>23</sup> Firing at Gurdwara Sis-Ganj, Delhi, and subsequent police excesses, and depression in the prices of agricultural goods further embittered the Sikhs, especially the rural peasantry, and brought a large number of Sikh extremists into the fold of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Panjab.<sup>24</sup> The Shiromani Akali Dal and various Akali jathas launched a campaign of boycott and picketing of shops selling liquor.

It was the nationalist spirit and friendship with the Indian National Congress which was greatly responsible for Master Tara Singh and his lieutenants persuading the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Central Sikh League to pass a formal resolution for boycott of general elections in response to the Congress call. On various other national issues Master Tara Singh's group commanded the confidence of the Sikh majority because of its close association with the Indian National Congress and other nationalist forces in the country. Baba Kharak Singh, who was the hero of the Akali Movement and at one time a staunch supporter of the Congress programme, lost rapport with the nationalist leadership on such issues as 'non-representation' of the Sikhs on the National Flag and other matters. Non-participation of Baba Kharak Singh and his group in the Civil Disobedience Movement further weakened Babaji's position in Sikh nationalist politics. On the other hand, Master Tara Singh's active participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, his ability to carry with him a majority of the Sikh masses on the Congress call for boycott of general elections and his non-participation in the First Round Table Conference brought him even closer to the nationalist leadership.

That Master Tara Singh's name carried much weight in Sikh nationalist politics is evident from the fact that, on his refusal to attend the First Round Table Conference, the government selected a loyalist Sikh from the princely state of Patiala with the same name. During the annual session of the Central Sikh League, presided over by Master Tara Singh and attended by Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, it was clarified that Tara Singh, a judge of the Patiala High Court, who was sent to London to attend the First Round Table Conference in January 1931, was not a representative



of the League. Master Tara Singh and his group agreed to participate in the Second Round Table Conference in London only after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed and Congress and Akali volunteers arrested in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement released.

Master Tara Singh and other Sikh representatives met Gandhiji before his departure for London to attend the Second Round Table Conference. As is well known, the Conference could not make any headway due to differences of opinion on communal representation. Gandhi returned disappointed only to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement. Since Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders refused to attend the Round Table Conference, the Government tried to impose its own solution of the ticklish communal problem through the 'Communal Award' announced by the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald. As the Award conceded communal demands of the Muslim League and in fact ensured a permanent Muslim majority in the Panjab, the Sikhs' reaction to it was natural. Master Tara Singh and his supporters decided to oppose the Award and organized a Shahidi Dal of 100,000 Sikh volunteers to fight communalism. In response to the Akali call, Ujjal Singh and Sampuran Singh resigned from the Consultative Committee of the Round Table Conference. The Congress attitude of neither accepting nor rejecting the Award greatly disturbed Master Tara Singh and other Sikh nationalists. While Tara Singh and others were busy persuading the Congress to reject the Award, the Government announced new elections in India as a result of the passage of the Government of India Act of 1935. Congress neutrality over the Communal Award and its inability to support the Sikhs over the Shahid Ganj issue made Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leaders believe that the Congress was compromising with growing Muslim communalism in Panjab. Under these circumstances he found it difficult to go with the Congress during the elections in the province, much less to forge an alliance with it. However, he reiterated that this could not be taken as his dissociation from the nationalist struggle, and emphasized that he would be in the front-line in case the Congress launched a fresh struggle against the government. Finding the nationalist Sikhs discontented, the



Congress leadership in Panjab tried to remove the Akali misgivings. The efforts of Dr Gopi Chand Bhargava and other Provincial Congress leaders for a rapprochement between the Congress and the Akali leadership resulted in the Akali Party coming back to the nationalist fold and announcing its decision to co-operate with the Congress Parliamentary Board in 'combating reactionary forces in this official-ridden province'.<sup>25</sup> Soon after, an electoral adjustment between the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal was announced. Under this arrangement, the Akalis were to contest fourteen of the twenty-four agreed seats, ten being left to Congressite Sikhs. The Akali list included such later Congress stalwarts as Swaran Singh, Partap Singh Kairon and Giani Kartar Singh. The Akali Party also accepted that its candidates returned to the legislature would form part of the Congress Legislature Party in the province and would abide by the Congress discipline.

However, the 1937 elections to the Panjab Assembly resulted into a clear-cut majority for the Unionist Party, but, in spite of its absolute majority, Sikandar Hyat Khan, leader of the Unionist Party, tried to win over other Hindu, Sikh and independent members of the assembly to strengthen his party's position. It was again thanks to the nationalism and fellow-feeling for the Congressmen that Master Tara Singh and his lieutenants stoutly resisted the overtures of Sikander Hyat and refused to support him or his policies in or outside the assembly. The growing influence of the Muslim League on the Unionist leadership and the signing of Sikander-Jinnah Pact caused as much anxiety to the Sikhs as to the Congress leadership. To strengthen the Congress against the growing influence of the Muslim League on the Unionist government, the Shiromani Akali Dal asked the Akali MLAs to join the Congress Party in the Panjab legislature. To the Akali leadership, the Sikander-Jinnah Pact appeared to be a definite move of reactionary forces to maintain the waning power and influence of British rule and a calculated move to check growing nationalism in the province.

Akali-Congress unity was clearly visible at the All-India Akali Conference held at Rawalpindi under the presidentship of Baldev Singh, where the Akali and Congress flags were



flown side by side.<sup>26</sup> The conference expressed lack of confidence in the Unionist Government in Panjab and exhorted the Sikhs to join the Congress which was described by Baldev Singh as 'the trustee of our national honour and national self-respect'.<sup>27</sup> Closer Akali-Congress co-operation resulted in some Akali functionaries getting high positions in the Congress set-up at the provincial and national levels, including Master Tara Singh being taken as a member of the AICC Working Committee. It was this bond of friendship and a strong sense of nationalism which was greatly responsible for the Sikh leadership generally supporting the Congress stand during various parleys for transfer of power and, finally, the Sikhs casting their lot with Independent India at the time of partition on 15 August 1947.



## AKALI STRUGGLE : PAST AND PRESENT

While a common cause (struggle for freedom) and a common enemy (the British rule) kept the Akalis close to the Congress till India became free cracks started appearing in the traditional friendship soon after. Akali leaders' ambition to capture power at the provincial level because of their sacrifices in the past and Congress inability to accept exclusive Akali claim for ruling the border state of Panjab resulted in serious differences of opinion and subsequent powerful agitations, while it is not possible here to go into the details of the Akali agitation for Punjabi Suba (1951-52); Akali *morcha* against the imposition of internal emergency in the country (1955-56) and the recent *Dharam Yudh morcha* resulting into Operation Blue Star and the tragic events that followed, what is relevant here is to discuss the way the Akali leaders and the Central government handled, nay mishandled, the situation. Whatever may be their other failings it goes to the credit of the past Akali leaders that they were clear about their goal and did not compromise on their basics. Akali achievement in the past is significant not only because of the large-scale Sikh participation—with less than 2% of India's population number of Sikhs who courted arrest matched those arrested in connection with the country-wide larger movement of non-cooperation. Again, while Mahatma Gandhi withdrew his movement in 1922 without achieving any of the three goals, *i.e.* (i) restoration of the Khalifa, (ii) righting the Panjab wrongs and (iii) Swaraj within one year, Akalis did not suspend their agitation till they got a Bill



passed on the lines acceptable to them. During subsequent agitations over the Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movement while the Akali leaders supported the Congress programme they did not hesitate to oppose the Congress when it came to defending the interests of the Sikh community. Thus the 'much-maligned' Master Tara Singh quit his membership of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress when the latter decided to boycott the British war efforts during World War II. If the Sikhs were occupying important positions in various services in free India it was mainly due to the vision and farsight of Akali leaders like Master Tara Singh. It is becoming increasingly fashionable to blame the past Akali leaders, especially Master Tara Singh, for not demanding or refusing to accept a 'Sikh Homeland' as if the same was being offered to them on a platter as was asserted by the late Sardar Kapur Singh.<sup>1</sup> Even some of the younger generation of Sikh scholars particularly Gurmit Singh,<sup>2</sup> a Sirsa-based advocate and Harjinder Singh Dilgir,<sup>3</sup> another advocate from Jullundur, have started supporting the above thesis and assert that "there was a chance to have a Khalistan and Master Tara Singh missed the opportunity."<sup>4</sup> There are others who feel that Master Tara Singh did not press for a 'homeland' for the Sikhs because of pressure from Sardar Baldev Singh who was the sole financier of the Akali Dal and had business interests in different parts of India.<sup>5</sup> Since such an issue needs serious investigation and research, I do not wish to discuss this here except to point out that even if the Britishers wanted to give the Sikhs a separate 'home-land' they could not do so because of a number of difficulties, demography being the most important one. During a meeting with Lord Mountbatten in London in 1975 I pointedly raised this issue with him and was told that the British Government never made such an offer to the Akali leaders.

It will be relevant here to quote the dialogue between Sir Stafford Cripps and the Sikh leaders. Giani Kartar Singh, who was one of the members of the Sikh delegation which met Cripps to present the Sikh point of view prior to partition of India, pleaded that the Sikhs would feel unsafe in either of the United India or Pakistan. They should have a province of



their own where they would be in a dominant or almost dominant position. In reply to Sir Stafford Cripps, who asked what would be the area of the proposed Sikh State, Giani Kartar Singh suggested that it should be the whole of Jullundur and Lahore divisions together with Hissar, Karnal, Ambala and Simla districts of the Ambala division and Montgomery and Lyallpur districts. Now if population figures were worked out the Sikhs in the proposed area would have been a very small minority. It cannot be believed that the majorities would have migrated out to India and Pakistan to allow Sikhs to have a dominant positions. Unless the Congress and Muslim League had agreed, the British Government could not have turned out Hindus and Muslims from this area.

This is also confirmed from the perusal of the correspondence between the British officials in Panjab and the higher echelons in Delhi and London. For instance in one of his letters to the Viceroy of India, Sir Bernard Glancy, the Governor of Panjab wrote:

“The Sikhs, although, as I have recently told you, they are undoubtedly relieved by the rejection of the offer brought by Sir Stafford Cripps, are still feeling distinctly restive, Master Tara Singh and his lieutenants have found it an easy matter to stir up communal feeling at the alleged danger of the Sikhs being subjected to Muhammadan rule in the Punjab. and they are loath to cease from exploiting this opportunity. They will no doubt derive some degree of comfort from the sympathetic references made to Sikhs in the debates which have just taken place in Parliament, but it is to be hoped that these expressions of sympathy will not go to their heads and lead them to believe that “Khalistan” is regarded in responsible quarters as a practicable proposition. As you are well aware, the practical objections to “Khalistan” are even greater than those which lie in the path of Pakistan. Apart from the upheaval that would be caused by tearing out a large section of territory from the vitals of the provincial body politic, it is worth remembering that there is not one single district in which the Sikhs command a



majority. Another illustration of the complexity of the problem is to be found in the Punjab State's agency. Little reliance can be placed on the results of the last census (of 1941) owing to the determination of all the communities to inflate their own figures, but it is true that a few years ago, though there are half a dozen Sikh States in the agency, there was only one state, the Muslim state of Malerkotla, where the majority of the population were Sikhs.

The obvious course for the Sikhs to pursue is to seek a satisfactory basis for combining with the major community in the Province."<sup>6</sup>

As is well-known, the demand for a Sikh homeland or Azad Panjab—where Sikhs were to hold the balance with Hindus and Muslims being in almost equal number—was being made to counter the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. Both the British government as also the Akali leaders knew that the Sikhs did not constitute majority in any particular area of the undivided Panjab. It was only after the Partition of India and subsequent migration of the Sikhs from the West to the East Panjab that they got consolidated in one state and after the merger of P.E.P.S.U. with Panjab, and its division on linguistic principle in 1946, that they have come to constitute nominal majority in the new state's population.<sup>7</sup>

While a detailed discussion on the Akali agitation for the creation of a Punjabi speaking<sup>8</sup> state is not possible it is worth mentioning that the very purpose for the creation of such a state seems to have been defeated. Contrary to the Akalis' expectation of perpetual domination in the newly created state, experience has shown that they have never been able to have a full term of a stable Akali ministry. Akali anxiety to capture power at the provincial level and to "experience the glow of freedom" promised to them by Jawaharlal Nehru and other important Congress leaders, and Congress policy of monopolising power both at the provincial and central level, was bound to result in clash sooner or later. While in the case of other states issues did not take communal shape in the case of Panjab it became so because the agitation for the creation of Punjabi Suba was spear-headed by the



Akali Dal and Punjabi, which in fact was the language of the people of Panjab, willy nilly got associated with the Sikhs alone with Akalis as its most vocal spokesmen. While Punjabi Hindus are to be squarely blamed for disowning their mother-tongue for political reasons some of the Akali leaders should also share the blame for confusing the Punjabi Suba agitation with the 'Sikh-majority state'. Since the Congress leadership, which ruled India, was unwilling to seriously consider any proposal based explicitly on religious and communal grounds, the Akali Dal tried to present its demand before the States Reorganisation Commission in 1953, on linguistic pattern without emphasising the point of Sikh-majority. As the Commission members had already been prejudiced as a result of Akali leaders' earlier arguments that "the Sikhs were promised the right of self-determination both by the British and the Congress leaders in 1946",<sup>9</sup> Akali demand for Punjabi Suba was summarily rejected. Punjabi Hindus' opposition to the Suba was used by the Commission to argue that the "demand lacked general support of the people inhabiting the area".<sup>10</sup> The Commission had not only rejected the Akali demand but also questioned the validity of Punjabi in Gurmukhi script as the language of the people of Panjab which made the Akali leaders feel humiliated.

After rejection of their demand for Punjabi Suba the Akalis launched a powerful agitation to achieve the goal. The Congress ruled centre tried to contain their Akali agitation through the Regional Formula, which almost accepted the principle of division of Panjab by dividing the legislative work among two regional committees, one for the Panjabi and other for the Hindi speaking areas of Panjab.<sup>11</sup> As a result the Akali Dal suspended its agitation and decided to merge with the Congress in contesting 1957 Assembly elections. But the Akalis soon realised their mistake. Partap Singh Kairon, who became the Chief Minister of Panjab, did not have any sympathy with the Akali demand for Punjabi Suba. Ironical as it may sound this old Akali turned to Congress became the biggest and most powerful instrument in suppressing the Akali agitation for Punjabi Suba in the years that followed. Without going into the details of the Akali agitation for Punjabi Suba what is relevant here is the point that the Akali leaders were



clear about the issue. While there were differences of approach—with Master Tara Singh still airing his grievances against the Congress and accusing Nehru and others of going back from their promises to the Sikhs and new leaders like Fateh Singh trying to give regional tone to the Akali demand—all the leaders were united in their basic object of getting their demand conceded through peaceful agitation within the constitutional and democratic framework. It was during the Akali agitation for Punjabi Suba that major development occurred when the leadership of the Akali Dal changed from the traditional non-Jat urban leadership to the newly emerging rural jat leadership. Master Tara Singh,<sup>12</sup> a middle-class educated non-jat leader, who emerged on the scene during the Akali agitation for Gurdwara reform in the 1920's and dominated the Akali politics for nearly four decades, was now ousted by Sant Fateh Singh, his own hitherto little known lieutenant who was till then known more for his religious and social work in Ganganagar area of Rajasthan and had little knowledge of or interest in Panjab politics. Backed by a powerful Jat peasantry Sant Fateh Singh introduced a secular note in the Akali politics by presenting the Punjabi Suba demand as based on "purely linguistic consideration". "We do not seek a Sikh majority area", the Sant declared, "we are not concerned about percentages. We want the Punjabi Suba to comprise an area where Punjabi language is spoken regardless of the fact whether the Sikhs are in a majority or minority".<sup>13</sup> This shift in stand weakened Hindu opposition to the Suba demand. By another clever move the Sant and his followers succeeded in creating a wedge amongst the opponents of Punjabi Suba by demanding Haryana and Punjabi Suba in one and the same breath. The new slogan had an electric effect in the Hindi speaking districts with the result that the Punjabi Hindus, who had been blocking the creation of a Punjabi Suba, were quickly isolated from the Haryanavis who, for their own interests, became supporters of Punjabi Suba demand. In the meantime some other developments took place which brought about a major change at the national level. Jawaharlal Nehru died on 27 May, 1944, and Lal Bahadur Shastri became the new Prime Minister of India. In Panjab Partap Singh Kairon, the powerful Chief Minister



of Panjab was replaced by a rather weak non-Sikh named Ram Kishan. With this change in leadership at almost all levels, opposition to the Punjabi Suba demand started dwindling and soon after a Cabinet sub-committee was appointed to consider the question of formation of a Punjabi speaking state which, ironically enough, became a reality in November 1941 with Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India.

While the creation of Punjabi Suba put an end to the long Akali agitation, the later history shows that it created more problems while solving one. The new Panjab was not the one the Akali Dal had demanded and hoped for. Since the division was made on the basis of 1942 census, wherein a large number of Punjabi Hindus had been returned Hindi-speaking for political reasons, as a result a large chunk of area which, in reality was Panjabi speaking, was left out of the new Panjab. Chandigarh, which was built on the Panjab territory and out of the resources of Panjab as its new capital, was put under the central control and declared a Union Territory and also joint capital of both Panjab and Haryana. Also control of the Bhakra Dam and Madhopur and other head-works was taken over by the centre. All this gave the Akali leaders a new cause to revive their agitation for redressing their grievances and keeping their agitation alive. But in the meantime a new development had taken place. For the first time Sikhs had come to form a majority (55%) in one of the states of the Indian union which created amongst the Akalis a hope of perpetual rule by emerging as regional alternative to the Congress rule in Panjab. While upto the creation of the Punjabi Suba the Akali leaders were united in their demand and were clear about the major issues, creation of the Punjabi Suba and their lust for power created serious differences. In addition to capturing the S.G.P.C. and its resources the Akalis now had another and much bigger source of strength and weakness, that is capturing political power in the new state. During the general elections of 1946, one year after the creation of the Punjabi Suba, the two Akali Dals—The Master and the Sant groups—worked at cross purposes. In trying to knock each other out, the two ended by capturing between themselves 26 out of 104 Assembly seats (Sant Akali 24 and Master group 2). In the newly created Punjabi Suba the



much maligned Congress still emerged as the single largest party with 48 seats. Since the Congress was unable to form the Ministry all the non-Congress groups combined to form a coalition government in Panjab with Gurnam Singh as the Chief Minister. While it is not relevant to discuss the ministry making in Panjab what is pertinent here is the fact that in their lust for political power the Akalis followed no scruples and betrayed not only the masses who had returned them to power but also the cause for which the Punjabi Suba was formed. In quick succession Gurnam Singh was dislodged by Lachhman Singh Gill but was himself defeated when he failed to get the budget passed through the legislature and was forced to resign. In the mid-term elections in February 1949 the Sant Akali Dal was returned as the largest party with 44 seats and Gurnam Singh again became the Chief Minister in an Akali-led coalition. During nearly two years' tenure as the Chief Minister of Panjab Gurnam Singh faced various crisis and awkward situations the worst of them being Darshan Singh Pheruman going on fast unto death for the inclusion of Chandigarh into Panjab and dying a martyr's death after having lived on water for 74 days.

While both the Akali leaders—Tara Singh and Fateh Singh—had broken their vows by going on fasts unto death and breaking them without achieving their goals, Pheruman, a veteran Congressman, put the Akalis to shame by living upto the Sikh tradition of never going back from the sacred oath. His martyrdom shook the conscience of the central government which announced that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would give her Award on Chandigarh and other issues. The Award, which was announced on 29 January, 1970, gave Chandigarh to Panjab in return for some Hindi speaking villages of Chandigarh together with cotton-rich Fazilka and Abohar as a 'compensation' to Haryana. This was a strange justice. Haryana was to be compensated (and this has become a live issue since then) for losing Chandigarh which did not belong to it. For sheer political expediency and to discredit the Akalis in the eyes of the Sikhs Haryana now onward was made a 'party' to most of the issues which were to be raised by Panjab whether through the Congress or the Akali



Chief Ministers. And this is what complicated matters in the years to come.

In Panjab Gurnam Singh was succeeded by Parkash Singh Badal, a rich landlord from Gidarbaha area of Malwa region, who formed coalition government with the Jana Sangh in March 1930 which lasted barely an year. In the Panjab Assembly elections in 1932 Congress recovered most of the ground it had lost soon after the creation of the Punjabi Suba. After emerging as the largest party in the state Assembly with 67 seats, the Congress formed government in Panjab with Giani Zail Singh<sup>14</sup> as the Chief Minister. Deeply rooted in Sikh tradition and having understood the Sikh psyche much better than his "predecessors Giani Zail Singh took over from the Akalis much of their religious issues. By introducing religious tone to the Panjab politics while Giani succeeded to a great extent in weakening the Akalis the result—growing communalisation of the provincial politics—was disastrous. In an attempt to secure votes for the Congress Giani organised one of the biggest religious processions commemorating the march of Guru Gobind Singh from Anandpur near Bhakra Nangal to Damdama near Bhatinda to woo the Sikhs. At the same time he tried to make inroads into the S.G.P.C. and the Akali Dal by promoting Dal Khalsa to oppose the Akalis in the S.G.P.C. elections. A good deal of literature dealing with recent Sikh problem points to Giani Zail Singh's involvement in Bhindranwale phenomenon in Panjab politics.<sup>15</sup> Mark Tully quoted Zail Singh having foot the bill of the inaugural meeting of the Dal Khalsa held in Aroma Hotel, Chandigarh on 13 April, 1938.<sup>16</sup>

In the Akali politics unprecedented developments have taken place during the last decade. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, who got himself elected as the President of the S.G.P.C. in 1939 and has manoeuvred to remain in position till date (except a brief interregnum from March to November 1936) has proved to be the cleverest of the Akali politicians. In a well-written article, 'Panjab and Mr. Tohra' Patwant Singh blames Mr. Tohra for most of the past and present troubles in Panjab. To quote him:

"The central fact which emerges out of a careful reading of



Panjab's politics is that Mr. Tohra is the one who has woven the many webs in which the State and Central Governments have so frequently been trapped. By allowing Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to use the shrine for his inflammatory politics, Tohra helped to place the Golden Temple, that sacred and exalted emblem of Sikhism, in the very eye of the political storm. It is entirely likely that its eventual destruction formed a part of his calculations, for he seems to have foreseen that an attack on the temple would do more to drive the Sikhs and the rest of India apart than any other event. What makes him doubly suspect is that he seems prepared to enact this scenario once again."<sup>17</sup>

Patwant Singh fears that Tohra's re-election as the President of the S.G.P.C. in November 1936 is fraught with dangers because "it could be the precursor of yet another calamitous collision over the Golden Temple" because his very first action after being elected as the President of the S.G.P.C. on 30 November, 1938, was to disband the special task force raised to keep the Temple precincts free from undesirable elements. Other Akali politicians played their part equally 'well' in falling into the trap of Mrs. Indira Gandhi by creating conditions which led to the traumatic events of June and disastrous consequences which followed. Jagdev Singh Talwandi, who was ousted from the presidentship of the Akali Dal tried to recover the lost ground by raising the slogan for more autonomy for Panjab which became the basis of the controversial Anandpur Sahib Resolution.<sup>19</sup> As if not to lag behind in the power struggle the official Akali Dal adopted Talwandi's child. Though the Anandpur Resolution was passed in 1940 the Akalis did not press for its implementation when they came to power in Panjab in 1941 and also shared power with the Janta Party at the Centre. However, it was only after the Akali defeat in the Assembly elections in 1944 that they revived their old programme of agitation. In the meantime Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale,<sup>19</sup> who started as a religious preacher but rose to be a major force in Panjab politics as a result of backing from the Congress put the Akali leaders on the defensive. Unless they could present something really radical there were little chances of their



regaining their influence with the Sikh masses and compete with Bhindrawale who made sentimental and emotional appeal to the rustic Sikh youth of Panjab. It was in this spirit of competition with Bhindrawale in the field of religion and with the Congress in the field of regional politics that the Akalis formally launched their *Dharam Yudh Morcha* on August 3, 1982, in the hope of getting some negotiated settlement on various long pending demands of the Akali Dal.

Since recent Akali politics is not the area of my specialisation and more competent scholars are likely to debate over this problem I would not like to go into the details of this latest phase of the Akali struggle. What is relevant here to point out is the fact that while during the first two phases of their struggle (i) the Akali Movement (1920-25) and (ii) Punjabi Suba agitation, the Akali leadership was more or less united and was clear about the main issues, during the post-Punjabi Suba agitation and especially during the *Dharam Yudh Morcha* not only the leaders have remained ambiguous over various issues but they have been working at cross-purposes. To discredit Longowal, Talwandi raised more extremist slogans. Similarly Gurcharan Singh Tohra allowed Bhindranwale and his men to occupy the Guru Nanak Niwas and later move to the Akal Takhat and helped his new ideology grow in the hope of reducing popularity of Harchand Singh Longowal whom he feared as a rival in Akali politics. And again while Tohra managed to save himself during Operation Blue Star, he opposed the Panjab Accord because this was going to help Longowal and his men to claim credit for solving the long pending demands of the Akalis. Strangely enough the same Mr. Tohra, who opposed the Accord and its signatories, lent his support to Surjit Singh Barnala in ministry making and in the bargain got Major Singh Uboke, Prem Singh Chandumajra, Harbhajan Singh Sandhu and Basant Singh Khalsa included in the Barnala cabinet, leaving Parkash Singh Badal in the lurch. However, when he was forced to resign his Presidentship of the S.G.P.C. he again joined hands with the Badal group and also helped extremists to regain their control over Golden Temple. As pointed out before, after re-election to the Presidentship of the S.G.P.C. in November 1986, Jathedar Tohra's very first act was to disband the



special task force raised to guard the Golden Temple against undesirable elements. What is happening in the Golden Temple these days is mainly the outcome of this wrong decision of Mr. Tohra. Mr. Amarinder Singh, scion of the royal Patiala family, who has all these years been a staunch opponent of Mr. Tohra and his politics, did not hesitate to join Tohra-Badal combine after he resigned from Barnala cabinet over the issue of police entry into the Golden Temple.

In the game of power politics Barnala has fared no better. The man who criticised the Congress government at the Centre for violating the sanctity of the Golden Temple by sending police and army in the sacred precincts, himself sent armed youth under the 'command' of his son Gagandip Singh to dislodge others whom he considered 'undesirable' and later sent police in the holy precincts on April 30, 1986 thus lending legitimacy to the army action in June '84. That the lust for power is stronger, than love of the Panth is clearly evident from the manner in which Mr. Barnala behaved since the time he signed an Accord with the Centre. After the death of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, who was the main source of strength of the Akali Dal, Mr. Barnala should have made efforts to carry with him important Akali leaders like Parkash Singh Badal and others to ensure unity in the party. It is a rather sad commentary that the Akali Dal which secured 73 seats in the Panjab Assembly elections in a house with a total strength of 117 was quickly reduced to a minority with the defection of Mr. Badal and 26 other MLAs belonging to his group. Instead of winning over Badal who carried lot of influence with the Sikh farmers in Malwa and also enjoyed confidence of a section of non-Sikhs, Barnala and his deputy Balwant Singh saw to it that Badal does not occupy any position of influence either in the Akali party or the newly formed Akali government in Panjab. Unfortunately Barnala-Balwant Singh combination started on the wrong note since the signing of the Panjab Accord and subsequent Akali victory in the provincial elections. They seem to have found in the Akali victory a personal triumph and not as a mandate in favour of late Sant Longowal's slogan, "Unity within the party and reconciliation with rest of the nation."



While forming the cabinet and re-organising the party Barnala-Balwant Singh faction made no secret of their monopolising power in the government and party on the pattern of what their patron Rajiv Gandhi was doing in the centre. Rather than aligning himself with people without much political roots Barnala should have made a serious effort to accommodate Mr. Badal especially when the latter was prepared to accept even number two position in the cabinet. May be for personal reasons he did not want a deputy who was too strong or was under pressure from his advisers in the centre not to have any truck with those who opposed the Panjab Accord. Whatever may be the reason Barnala and his group had clearly compromised the interests of the party and the community they claimed to represent for their personal ambition. Again it was the result of personal ambition to stay in power which prompted Barnala and his supporters to whisk away some forty MLAs to Chail and Shimla in the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh to check them from joining the rebel group of 27 who left the Akali Dal headed by Mr. Barnala over the issue of police entry into Golden Temple. To keep himself in power Barnala had to take a rather ignominious step of quickly adding 21 more legislators to the existing council of ministers, including three dissidents. But Barnala alone cannot be accused of compromising his principles for political power. This is equally true of other Akali leaders. As mentioned earlier, Gurcharan Singh Tohra first opposed the Panjab Accord but later joined hands with Barnala in return for latter's help for securing him another term as President of the S.G.P.C. and also for taking his proteges like Major Singh Uboke, Basant Singh Khalsa and Harbhajan Singh Sandhu into the Barnala cabinet. Again while Tohra criticised Barnala for police entry into the Golden Temple and made a common cause with the break away group led by Mr. Badal his proteges were not asked to give up their ministerial births. Basant Singh Khalsa confessed that though he was unhappy over the issue of police entry into the Golden Temple "he did not want to leave the Barnala group and thus allow the Barnala government to be dismissed by the centre the way it dismissed the minority-government of G.M. Shah in Jammu and Kashmir". Unfortunately for Basant Singh Khalsa and others who very



much wished to enjoy the benefits of remaining in power the Barnala government was still dismissed by the centre on the eve of Haryana elections in spite of Mr. Barnala toeing the central line and thus losing his credibility with the Sikh electorate over issues such as police entry into the Golden Temple, defying the *Hukamnama* and extending full support to the State police chief, J.F. Ribeiro in tackling the terrorist problem. After signing the Accord with the Prime Minister of India, which promised among other things, transfer of Chandigarh to Panjab on 26th January, 1986, the best thing for Barnala would have been to tender his resignation the moment he learnt that the transfer had again been postponed by the Prime Minister. That would have at least partly helped him regain the lost credibility with the Sikh electorate in Panjab.

A careful comparison between the past and present Akali leaders shows that there has been a qualitative change since the days of the Akali Movement. We no longer have men of stature like Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh, who refused to bargain for personal or political benefits. In spite of his very close association with Jawaharlal Nehru and others in the Congress who occupied positions of power in free India, Kharak Singh refused to get any position or personal benefit, not even pension as a freedom fighter to which he was legitimately entitled. Similarly Master Tara Singh refused to compromise the interests of his community over the issue of Sikhs' recruitment during World War II and resigned from the Working Committee of the Congress to help Sikhs get into the armed services. He had differences with the Congress but he always kept the doors for negotiations opened. But at no stage did he bargain for any political position by compromising with the centre and sacrificing the interests of the Sikh community. In utter contrast for the present leaders the S.G.P.C. and other Gurdwara platforms have become ladders to climb to political power. The classic examples of this change of attitude are those of the President of the S.G.P.C. and the Head-Priest of the holy Harimandir Sahib seeking nomination to the Rajya Sabha. While using religion for political agitations has been, and continues to be, the Akali forte, use of the S.G.P.G. and other religious plat-



forms for furthering personal and political ambitions is a recent phenomenon which is fraught with dangers.

It is time Akali leaders learn from their past and rise above narrow prejudices and personal ambitions and provide much needed leadership to the Sikh community at this critical juncture in the recent history. At the same time the government of India should give up its policy of dividing and weakening the Akali leadership because a strong Akali leadership alone can act as a buffer between the government and the extremist elements in Panjab and bring peace to the strife-torn state. While the Sikhs should not allow their holy places to be misused by vested interests the government should also learn how to handle the religious issues concerning a sensitive minority like the Sikhs. 7



## NOTES

### Chapter 1

1. The word Gurdwara is a compound of the two Panjabi words, *Guru* and *Dwara*, literally meaning the Guru's gate. The word Dharamsal, literally means a free lodge. In the present context it means a place of religion where, apart from being given free board and lodging the followers go to earn religious merit. Kahan Singh, *Mahankosh*, p. 496.
2. Sangat means congregation of followers. Pangat, literally meaning one row or line, required followers to sit in one line while partaking in the free-kitchen, *Mahankosh*, p. 179; Fauja Singh, 'Development of Sikhism under the Gurus' in *Sikhism* (Guru Nanak Quincenary Celebration Series), Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 6.
3. From the *Puratan Janamsakhi* we learn that the first Dharamsal was erected at Tulamba (near Multan in Pakistan) and Sajjan was put in charge of it to propagate Sikh faith in that area, *Puratan Janamsakhi* [Bhai Vir Singh (Ed.), 5th Edition], p. 74.
4. Ganda Singh, 'Guru Nanak's Impact on History' in *Guru Nanak* published by the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, p. 90.
5. The word Sikh is derived from the Sanskrit *Shishya*, meaning disciple or a devoted follower. *Mahankosh* defines Sikh as a follower of Guru Nanak who has accepted his faith and who recognises the *Guru Granth Sahib* as his religious book (p. 144). Thus, those who followed Guru Nanak's religion came to be known as his Sikhs or disciples.
6. *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, Var I, *Pauri XXXVIII*, lines 1, 6, 7, 8.
7. Till recently the above work was attributed to Mohsin Fani. The book is now attributed to Zulfikar Ardistani also called Mubid. See Ganda Singh, 'Nanak Panthis' in the *Panjab Past and Present*, Vol I, Part I, p. 47.
8. *Guru Nanak and Nanak Panthis* (English translation of the portions of *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* relating to the Sikhs by Ganda Singh) published in the Guru Nanak Number of the *Panjab Past and Present*, September



9. In the present context Manji means centre for the propagation of the Sikh faith. *Mahankosh*, p. 750. Fauja Singh, op. cit., p. 8.
10. Masand, corrupted form of the Persian Masnad, means agent or deputy in the present context.
11. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 27.
12. *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, XIII (19).
13. For a detailed account see Giani Gian Singh's *Sri Guru Panth Parkash*, pp. 160-1; *Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 52.
14. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. IV, pp. 316-7.
15. Kesar Singh Chhibar, *Gurbilas Patshahi Das*, p. 132
16. *Ibid*, verses 351-4; Macauliffe, op. cit., Vols. V, VI, p. 86, n. 18, p. 248-9
17. 'O' Mardana take not the food given as an offering as, like poison, it is indigestible', *Gurmat Martand*, Vol. II, p. 687.
18. Quoted in Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement and Sikh Awakening*, p. 16.
19. For a detailed account see Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *Short History of the Sikhs*, pp. 109-10.
20. The word *Udasi* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Udas* meaning grief, dejection. The sect owes its origin to Baba Sri Chand, eldest son of Guru Nanak, who adopted a peculiar type of dress and formed a new class of Sikh preachers, *Mahankosh*, p. 7. See for details Ishar Singh, *Itihas Baba Siri Chand ate Udasin Sampardai*; 'Sources on the life of Guru Nanak' special number of the *Panjab Past and Present*, pp. 116-9, 190-1 and 211-23, *Gurmat Martand*, Vol I, p. 6
21. John Campbell Oman, The Order of the 'Udasis' in the *Panjab Past and Present*, September
22. Mahant means head of a Dera, Akhara or a sect or the chief Sadhu, *Mahankosh*, p. 700.
23. John Campbell Oman, op. cit., p. 191.
24. In the Sikh social and moral codes, called *Rehatnamas*, it is laid down that the income from the Gurdwaras is meant for works of public welfare. Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh warned the priests against using the trust income to meet their personal needs. *Mahankosh*, pp. 312, 496 and 698.
25. Baba Dayal was born in Vaisakh 1840 BK (circa April 1738) at Peshawar. For a detailed account see Dr. Man Singh Nirankari's article in the *Panjab Past and Present*, April 1973, pp. 1-11 and Dr. Ganda Singh, 'Nirankari Sampardai' in the *Panjab*, Vol. II, p. 90
26. Ganda Singh, op. cit.
27. Fauja Singh, the *Kuka Movement*, p. 15
28. Dr. Ganda Singh traces the origin of the movement to Bhagat Jawahar Mal and mentions Baba Balak Singh as one of his prominent disciples. According to him it was Baba Balak Singh who popularised the new movement. Baba Ram Singh, who is accepted



as 'Guru' by the Kukas, was one of the three important followers of Baba Balak Singh ('Kuka Lehar' in the *Panjab*, Vol. II, pp. 96-9). Dr. Fauja Singh and Dr. M M. Ahluwalia accept Baba Ram Singh as the founder of the movement. There is yet another point of difference between Dr. Ganda Singh and Dr. Fauja Singh. While the former believes that the Kukas' was a 'purely religious movement', the latter credits the movement with 'political goals'. Marking the difference between the Kuka and the other socio-religious movements Dr. Fauja Singh writes: 'Whereas the other movements devoted themselves entirely to social and reform activities with the main emphasis on re-examination of the prevailing thought and practices . the Kuka movement concentrated on these reforms primarily with the object of preparing the ground for the attainment of a political goal'. Fauja Singh, *Kuka Movement*, pp. 1-2 However, Dr. Ganda Singh does not agree with this thesis and believes that this 'purely religious movement' was described by the English officers who had been terrorised by the rising of 1857, as 'political' and 'revolutionary' and explains the Kukas' boycott of courts, railways, post-offices and their use of Swadeshi as making virtue of necessity. (Kuka Lehar' in the *Panjab*, Vol. II of *Bhai Jodh Singh Abhinandan Granth*, pp. 103-12).

29. Baba Ram Singh was born in village Bhaini (District Ludhiana) on 3 February 1816. See for details Ganda Singh, 'Kuka Lehar' in the *Panjab*, Vol. II, pp. 96-9 and Fauja Singh, *Kuka Movement*.
30. Fauja Singh, *Kuka Movement*, p. 24.
31. *Ibid*, p. 29.
32. In the Parliamentary Papers relating to the Kuka sect the following account is given about Baba Ram Singh's activities: '...He abolishes all distinctions of caste among Sikhs; advocates indiscriminate marriages of all classes, enjoins the marriage of widows, all of which he performs himself, he never takes alms himself and prohibits his followers from doing so, enjoins abstinence from liquors and drugs. . .he exhorts his disciples to be cleanly and truth-telling and it is well that every man carries his staff; and they all do. The Granth is their only accepted inspired volume The brotherhood may be known by the tie of their turban—*sheeda pug*—by a watch-word, by necklace of knots made in a white woollen cord, to repeat beads and which are worn by all the community'. Home-Judicial Proceedings, 273-84, August 1872, quoted in Fauja Singh, *Kuka Movement*, p. 20.
33. Ganda Singh 'Kuka Lehar', in the *Panjab*, Vol. II, n. 28, pp. 96-7.
34. *Ibid*.
35. Following verses which became current in those days explain the people's hatred for the British rule in India: *London se melechh char aae; Inhan ne ghar ghar buchar khane pae; Guran de inhan ghat Karae; Sanu hun sir dene aae.*  
(The unclean have come from London, and have established



- slaughter houses in every place; they have killed our Gurus. And we must now sacrifice ourselves), K.S. Talwar, 'Early Phases of the Sikh Renaissance and Struggle for Freedom' in the *Panjab Past and Present*, October
36. See for details the Singh Sabha number of the *Panjab Past and Present*, April 1933, G.S. Dhillon's Ph.D. dissertation, 'Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement', Punjabi University, Patiala.
  37. D. Petrie, *Secret C.I.D. Memorandum on Some Recent Developments in Sikh Politics*, para 18, republished in the *Panjab Past and Present*, October
  38. *Ibid.*
  39. *Ibid.*
  40. *Ibid.*
  41. *Ibid.*
  42. *Ibid.*
  43. *Ibid.*
  44. During his visit to the Khalsa College, Amritsar, in 1907, the students of the college not only gave him a warm and enthusiastic reception but became so much excited that they unyoked the horses of his carriage and drove the carriage themselves from the railway station to the college. *Secret Memorandum*, para 13. Later Mahatma Gandhi, while addressing the students of the Khalsa College in October 1920, exhorted them to boycott the English, stop receiving their grants and become true Khalsas *Collected Works*, Vol XVIII, p. 311.
  45. *Secret Memorandum*, para 19
  46. The book was proscribed by the authorities in the Panjab. A copy of this is available in the list of material sent to the Secretary of State for India and now preserved in the Proscribed Indian Books at the British Museum (Oriental Collection), London, where I consulted it.
  47. *Ibid.*
  48. After the defeat of the forces of the Lahore Durbar in the first Anglo-Sikh War (1845-46), the great sons of the Panjab like Bhai Mahraj Singh, Diwan Mul Raj, Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala and Bedi Bikram Singh of Una, organised a powerful anti-British movement in the Panjab and with the assistance of Rajput chiefs of the hills tried to recover their lost dominion. This resulted in the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49). Even after their defeat and subsequent annexation of the Panjab on 29 May 1849, these brave men did not lose courage and continued their struggle against the British authorities in one form or the other. They were successful in reclaiming Maharaja Duleep Singh, who had earlier been converted to Christianity when he was a minor, to the fold of Sikhism. They encouraged him to declare war against the British rulers in India with the help of the Czar of Russia. The Maharaja left



England and went to Russia to meet the Czar but nothing came out of this visit and he had to return to Paris where he died on 22 October 1893. For details see Ganda Singh (Ed.), *Correspondence Relating to Maharaja Duleep Singh*, Punjabi University, Patiala.

49. In spite of the fertile soil, irrigation facilities and hard work, the economic condition of the majority of the peasants in the Panjab was far from satisfactory. Apart from natural causes, such as uncertain rainfall, and heavy mortality of the livestock, the fragmentation of the land and growing rural indebtedness made the Panjab peasantry very unhappy. The passage of the Alienation of Land Act in A.D. 1900 did not really help the small farmer as it only provided against the expropriation of the agriculturist by a non-agriculturist but made no provision against the expropriation of the small peasant by the rich landlords. The agriculturist money-lender, who replaced the village Bania, fleeced the small peasants in a manner as unscrupulous as that of the previous money-leader. Therefore, any little increase in the revenue was bound to hit the small peasant hard who was generally living in perpetual debt.
50. O'Donnell, *Causes of the Present Unrest in India*, p. 94. For instance the land revenue from Panjab which earlier amounted to Rs. 1,500,000 in 1891, went up to 1,925,000 in 1906.
51. *The Panjabi*, May-June 1907; *The Jhang Sayal*, *The Tribune*, *The Khalsa Samachar*, May 1907, quoted in Sri Ram Sharma's *The Panjab in Ferment*, pp. 14-15 *Jhang Sayal*, Appendix VIII, p. 74 of the above work.
52. For a detailed account of the official measures against the agitators see N. Gerald Barrier, 'The Panjab Disturbances of 1907' in the *Modern Asian Studies*. No. 1, Vol. IV, 1930, pp. 353-83.
53. Lady Minto, *India: Minto and Morley*, pp. 130-1.
54. The association was organised in the summer of 1913. In the initial stages it merely looked after and protected the rights of the Indian emigrants in Canada and U.S.A. But later, as a result of various causes of disaffection against British imperialism, the party broadened its base by including the freedom of India in its sphere of activities. The very first issue of the *Ghadr-di-Gunj* (The Echo of Rebellion) stated the objectives of the Ghadr Party in the following manner:  
 Today, there begins in foreign lands, but in our country's language, a war against the British raj. . . . What is our name? Ghadr. What is our work? Ghadr. Where will Ghadr break out? In India. The time will soon come when rifles and blood will take the place of pen and ink, *Ghadr*, November 1913, quoted in Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*. Vol II, p. 177. For details see Sohan Singh Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna*; Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, *Ghadr: 1914-15*; G.S. Deol, *Ghaar Party and the Indian National Movement*, Gurcharan Singh



- Sahansra, *Ghadr Lehar* and A. C. Bose; *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1922*.
55. According to official reports, the Ghadrites were able to secure an encouraging response from the men of the 23rd Cavalry at Lahore, 26th Panjabis at Ferozepur, 12th Cavalry and 28th Pioneers at Meerut. Isomonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadr Conspiracy, 1913-15*; Michael O'Dwyer, *India As I Knew It*, p. 197.
  56. The Chief Khalsa Diwan and pro-British managers of the important Sikh Shrines reiterated their loyalty to the British empire by having *Hukamnamas* issued from the Akal Takhat in which the Ghadrite heroes were described as 'renegades' and the Sikhs were exhorted not to help them in their programme. Khuswant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol 11, p. 183
  57. *Ibid*, see Note 56.
  58. In order to legitimise the extraordinary powers assumed by the Government to check the revolutionary activities during the War, two new Bills were introduced on the recommendations of Sir Sidney Rowlett. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
  59. *Disorders Enquiry Committee Report*, p. 29, gives number of the killed as four.
  60. *Ibid.*, pp 37-9.
  61. *The Tribune*, 14 October 1919.
  62. Quoted in Michael O'Dwyer, op. cit., p. 284.
  63. While the official version puts the figures at 200 dead, the Congress Sewa Samiti is said to have given the figure as 500 based on actual tracing of corpses. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol XVII, p. 174.
  64. Colvin, *Life of General Dyer*, p. 201. Confirmed by *The Tribune* (article on 'Gurdwara Reform' 9 May 1925, *The Akali*, 17 December 1921).
  65. Colvin, op. cit., p. 201. This dialogue is also quoted in Sohan Singh Josh, a contemporary and participant in the Akali Movement, in his book, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 15-6. In return for the honour he did to the General, Arur Singh was later honoured with K.C.I.E. (*The Akali*, 3 January 1921).
  66. Colvin, op. cit., p. 201. *The Civil and Military Gazette* also confirms 'the Sikh Symbols having been presented to the General' (25 January 1920 issue at the British Newspaper Library, Colindale, London). The incident is also confirmed by a number of contemporaries. In my personal interviews while Bhai Jodh Singh professed ignorance of the important incident Jathedar Pritam Singh, Giani Mahna Singh and Sardar Sohan Singh Josh, have confirmed this.

## Chapter 2

1. Quoted in Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, p. 92.



2. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
4. Files containing copies of the 'Resolutions of the Chief Khalsa Diwan', Amritsar.
5. Memorials of the Khalsa Diwan began with a recitation of the 'glorious actions of friendship of the Government and favours done to the Sikh community' and ended with 'humble prayers for more concessions'.
6. Gurdwara Rakabganj, Delhi, marks the place where the beheaded body of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, was cremated. In 1913, its boundary wall was demolished to provide a straight road to the Viceregal lodge. Harchand Singh and S.S. Caveeshar organised a Shahidi Jatha and the wall was repaired. See for details, *The Panjab*, pp. 12-13; and Sangat Singh, *Freedom Movement in Delhi*, pp. 198-219.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. According to a modern critic, 'For the Chief Khalsa Diwan the highest nation was the Sikhs but higher still was the British Government'. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 17.
11. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 93.
12. For instance Mahant Narain Das of Nankana's income was between four and five lakhs. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, XIX, pp. 20-1.
13. For instance, when in 1895 a Jatha of the Sikhs from Lahore approached the Mahants of Nankana they agreed to serve under a representative Committee of Management and signed a formal agreement for the purpose in the presence of the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore. Not soon after the signing of the document they changed their minds and the agreement became a dead letter. Mahants of other Gurdwaras also adopted a similar policy. Teja Singh *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 87-88.
14. The Charitable and Religious Trusts Act (Act XIV of 1920) quoted in Mukherjee's *Hindu Law of Religious and Charitable Trusts*.
15. Cases of Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber, Sialkot and Panja Sahib could not be pursued for want of the court fee of Rs. 50,000 in the case of former and Rs. 5,000 in the case of the latter. Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Lehar*, p. 85.
16. Tacit official support to the vested interests is borne out from the letter which C.M. King wrote to Baba Kartar Singh Bedi saying, *inter alia*, that '...any person who attempts to eject forcibly any Mahant. . . is liable to punishment under the law. . .' Letter in File No. 179-II/1922, Appendix I.
17. Cases of Akali Phula Singh's Samadh and the Gurdwara of Hafizabad are some important instances. See Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 101-2.



18. The word Akali, literally meaning immortal, was first used by Guru Gobind Singh for those of his followers who were prepared to sacrifice their all for the protection of their religious places. Their dark blue garments, typical head-dress (consisting of a tall conical turban, quoits, double-edged swords and Kripan) and their fanatical temperament made them zealous fighters for religious causes. Because of their fanatical and violent character they came to be known as Nihangs (dragons). They were known for the purity of character and sincerity of conviction and commanded great respect from the Sikh community. In the field of religion they enjoyed a unique position and came to be regarded as the guardians of the Akal Takhat at Amritsar and other important Gurdwaras. During the dark days of Sikh history (1708-99) they had to undergo great hardships in keeping alive the torch of Sikhism. But during the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule and after the annexation and consequent tranquility in religious affairs, most of them retired to an easy life and lost much of their old spirit, *Mahankosh*, p. 527, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 443-7 and Baba Prem Singh Hoti's Preface to the biographical account of *Akali Phula Singh*, (Panjab).
19. First issue of the daily *Akali* quoted by its editor, Hira Singh Dard in his memoirs, *Merian Kujh Itihasik Yadan*, p. 153; Speech of Sardar Tara Singh, M.L.C., in the Panjab Legislative Council delivered on 8 July 1925, *Proceedings*, Vol. VIII-A, July 1925.
20. The Gurdwara, built in memory of Guru Nanak's visit to that place, came to be popularly known as Babe-di-Ber because the Guru sat under a Ber tree there. For a detailed account see Giani Kartar Singh, *Babe-de-Ber Stalkot*, pp. 10-15.
21. *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 124.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. According to the *Amritsar District Gazetteer*, the city of Amritsar, earlier called Ramdasapur and Guru-ka-Chak, was founded by the fourth Guru, Ram Dass, on the 500 *bighas* of land given by Emperor Akbar in A.D. 1577 (pp. 1,20). The fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, built the Temple in 1589. The sixth Guru, Hargobind, built the Akal Takhat and declared it as the Sikh seat of temporal authority. In its earlier stages, the Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat were looked after by competent and pious priests like Bhai Mani Singh. But during the period of the persecution of the Sikhs at the hands of the Mughal Governors of Panjab and later by the Abdali invader, Ahmad Shah, the control of these two important Sikh centres passed on to the Udasi Mahants. During the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule the shrine was richly decorated with marble and gold plates and came to be known as the Golden Temple. A rich revenue-free jagir was also attached to these shrines. After the annexation of the Panjab to the British India in 1849, the



- British Government took over the control of these two places and appointed a Committee of ten members headed by a Sarbrah to look after their day-to-day affairs. (John Maynard, 'The Sikh Problem in the Panjab' in the *Contemporary Review*, September 1923, p. 295). While the Sarbrah was busy pleasing his appointing authority—the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar—the priests indulged in all sorts of evil practices, such as misappropriation of offerings and other valuables. These places had been converted into hunting places for rogues where brothels were run, pornographic literature sold and innocent women visiting the temples raped. *Jiwan Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid*, p. 121.
26. The officially appointed Sarbrah was used by the Government to condemn the Sikh organisers of the Komagata Maru. Earlier, the priests of the Sikh *Takhats* were moved to issue a *Hukamnamah* condemning the Singh Sabha Movement, and later the activities of the Ghadrates, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 90-1.
  27. *Jiwan Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid*, p. 121; Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 40-1.
  28. Resolutions of the Sikh League, Amritsar, Resolution No. 14.
  29. *Khalsa Advocate*, May-June 1906; *The Panjab*, May 1906.
  30. Resolution No. 14 quoted in Note 28.
  31. Panjab Legislative Council *Proceedings*, 13 March 1920.
  32. *Ibid.*
  33. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 41.
  34. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
  35. *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 149.
  36. *Ibid.*
  37. Confidential Report dated 26 March 1921 from the Officiating Chief Secretary, Panjab Government, to Home Department, Government of India.
  38. According to the practice followed in the Golden Temple the 'low-caste' Sikhs could visit it at a special time fixed for the purpose. They could not touch their Karah Prasad and had to engage the services of a man of 'higher caste' to carry it to the Temple. Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, pp. 61-2, Kartar Singh Jhabbar, *Akali Morche-te-Jhabbar*, pp. 63-4.
  39. Principal Niranjan Singh, *Jiwan Yatra Master Tara Singh*, p. 71; also his reminiscences published in the *Jathedar*, 20 August 1967.
  40. The Committee consisted of the following members:
    1. Professor Teja Singh
    2. Bawa Harkishan Singh
    3. Bhai Deva Singh
    4. Bahadur Singh Hakeem
    5. S. Teja Singh Bhuchar
    6. Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar
    7. S. Chanda Singh



8. Dr. Gurbux Singh  
*Akali Morche-te-Jhabbar*, p. 61.
41. File No. 459-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
42. Jhabbar, op. cit., pp. 79-80.
43. This Gurdwara was founded by Guru Arjan in A.D. 1500. Besides being a place of worship it is also a special refuge for lepers who still visit the place in thousands to get cured after a dip in the holy tank. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 197.
44. According to an eyewitness, the moral degradation of the Mahants had reached its climax by 1920. They had the audacity to declare publicly that 'Durbar Sahib is our shop, like other shops of people'. The son of a priest was quoted as having said 'We will dishonour those women who will visit Durbar Sahib. Those who want this should send their women to Durbar Sahib, others who do not want them to be dishonoured should not send them. . .', *Jiwan Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid*, p. 175. According to another contemporary, some of the priests were found drunk while in attendance on the holy Granth. Thefts were very common. No woman's honour was safe in the temple. *Gurdwara Reform Movement*. p. 198; Jhabbar op. cit., p. 96.
45. *Jiwan Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid*, p. 174
46. Lachhman Singh was born in village Dharowali, district Gurdaspur, in A.D. 1886 and was closely connected with the Sikh reformist and educational activities. During the early days of the reform movement he led Jathas to various Gurdwaras. He was the leader of the Akali Jatha to Nankana which met a tragic end at the hands of Mahant Narain Das and his men. See for details Gurbux Singh Jhabalia, *Shahidi Jiwan*, pp. 59-98.
47. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, 198.
48. *Mohan Singh Vaid*, p. 372.
49. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 207.
50. Undated letter written probably on 18 December 1920, published in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, 1 March 1921.
51. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 56.
52. In the case, seven Akalis were sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 50 each. *The Akali*, 19 January 1922.
53. Next to Janam Asthan there are Gurdwaras like Bal Lila, the place where Nanak used to play during his childhood; Kiara Sahib, where the Guru made up the loss of a farmer whose field was spoilt by the Guru's buffaloes; Mal Sahib, where a snake is said to have spread its hood to protect the Guru from the sun; Khara Sauda, where the Guru made a good bargain by feasting the hungry Sadhus and Patti Sahib where the Guru wrote his first lesson on a wooden slate. Gurbux Singh Jhabalia, op. cit., pp. 82-3; Jhabbar, op. cit., pp. 103-9 and Narain Singh's autobiographical account, *Kujh Haad Biti, Kujh Jag Biti*, pp. 99-100.
54. The Mahant became a notorious drunkard and womaniser and



- contacted venereal diseases, of which he died soon after. *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 219-20.
55. This new Mahant, apart from indulging in drinking and adultery was also guilty of having invited dancing girls in the holy precincts on the occasion of the marriage of his nephew. Partap Singh Giani, *Gurdwara Sudhar: arthat Akali Lehar*, p. 113.
  56. *The Loyal Gazette*, 27 February 1921, quoted in the Panjab Press Abstracts, fortnight ending 28 February 1921, N.A.I.
  57. According to the existing tradition no person could succeed to the Mahantship without the prior approval of the Governor of Panjab or his authorised nominee, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, *India As I Knew It*, p. 320 Even the Government Prosecutor in the *Nankana Sahib Case* admitted that 'Mahant's influence and purse had been at work everywhere'. Statement of H.A. Herbert quoted in *The Tribune*, 9 September 1921.
  58. Assurances of help given to the Mahant by C.M. King during Mahant's meetings with him. Quoted in File No. 179-II/1922, Home-Political. N.A.I.
  59. In 1918, 13-year-old daughter of a retired Extra Assistant Commissioner from Sind was raped by a Sadhu. In the same year, six women of Jaranwala were raped during their night's stay in the Gurdwara. *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 221; Jhabbar, op. cit., pp. 104-6.
  60. Gurbux Singh Jhabalia, *Shahidi Jiwan*, p. 74.
  61. In the *Nankana Sahib Case*, H.A. Herbert, the Government Prosecutor, quoted a letter found in the safe of Mahant Narain Das in which his fellow Mahants exhorted him that 'in the event of the Akalis coming to take possession of Nankana shrine *he should not hesitate to kill and burn them*'. *Proceedings* quoted in *The Tribune*, 15 September 1921. *The Akali*, 16 April 1922, alleged that Mr. King had given a promise of help to Narain Das after accepting a bribe from him. In the *Akali v. C.M. King Defamation Case*, quoted in File No 179-II/1922, Home-Political and *The Akali*, 15 January 1923. C.M. King, in his Personal Explanation in the Panjab Legislative Council (13 March 1921) admits of Mahant's interview with him.
  62. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 10 April 1921.
  63. Fortnightly Report for the second half of November 1920, in File No. 179-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  64. Personal Explanation given in the Panjab Legislative Council, 13 March 1921, *Proceedings*, pp. 80-1.
  65. In reply to Col. Raghbir Singh's question in the Council on 11 March 1921, *Proceedings*, p. 304.
  66. In the Court Judgment all these preparations of the Mahant have been accepted. *Proceedings* in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 7 August 1921.
  67. Panjab Legislative Council, *Proceedings*, March 1921.



68. *Ibid.*
69. Statement of Mahant Narain Das in File No 179-II/1922. In a statement the Mahant said, 'I was told by the Commissioner and other responsible Government officials that this was a religious matter and *I was told to make my own arrangements.*'
70. Undated letter (written on or after 18 December, 1920), Appendix I.
71. The fact was brought to my notice by Dr. Ganda Singh in the course of a discussion on my paper 'Official Involvement in the Nankana Tragedy' read at the Panjab History Conference at Patiala on 20 September 1922. Dr. Ganda Singh said he remembers this letter having been quoted in some newspaper but could not exactly recollect its name and date. During my search for material in India and the United Kingdom I tried my best to trace this letter in the old newspapers and records but could not find the letter in question. However, in the old issues of *The Civil and Military Gazette* there is a reference to a servant of the Mahant, named Ladha, going to a shop on the Mall in Lahore and having brought 'boxes of pistol cartridges' on two different occasions (issue dated 30 April 1921).
72. Jhabbar, op. cit pp 105-6.
73. *Ibid*
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, pp 112-3.
76. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 8 May 1921.
77. *The Tribune*, 12 April 1921.
78. *Ibid* , 10 July 1921.
79. Statement of Jhanda Singh, one of the four survivors of the Jatha, quoted in *The Tribune*, 10 July 1921.
80. *Ibid.*, 15 September 1921.
81. *Ibid* , 1 March 1922, Account by Lala Girdhari Lal.
82. *Ibid.*, also confirmed by Mahant's servant Urjan Das, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 7 August 1921.
83. Evidence of approver Amar Singh Patwari, *The Tribune*, 12 April 1921. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 22 February 1924, quotes Mr. Currie, the D.C. Sheikhpura, as having confirmed this.
84. Quoted in *The Tribune*, 9 September 1921.
85. Letter No 30, 21 August 1922, from Lord Reading, the Viceroy and the Governor-General of India, to Hon'ble Edwin Samuel Montague, Secretary of State for India. Reading Papers, Mss Eur E 238, Vol. III There are different versions regarding the exact number of persons killed at Nankana. The fact that the Mahant and his men tried to obliterate all traces of the killing by burning the dead bodies before the police or other officials could arrive and count the number made it difficult to determine the exact number of casualties. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, in his first telephonic message to the Khalsa College, Amritsar, put the number of dead at 20. This very low figure might have been given either due to incomplete information or on account of official anxiety to



- minimise the effect of the tragedy on the teachers and students of the Khalsa College. Both the Akali leadership as well as the Indian press expressed astonishment at the figures given by the Deputy Commissioner. Later, in a communique, the Panjab Government accepted the figure of 130 dead (Communique dated 27 February 1921, quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette* 23 October 1921).
86. Gurbux Singh Jhabalia, *Shahidi Jiwan*, pp. 138-41. Most of these telegrams are quoted in the above work, pp. 105-9.
  87. Discussion on the police inaction in Nankana (*Proceedings*, of the Panjab Legislative Council, 11 March 1921, p. 304).
  88. *The Sikh*, 3 March 1921. According to *Shahidi Jiwan* (p. 141), Mahant Narain Das bribed Sub-Inspector Jang Bahadur who was asked by the Deputy Commissioner to count the number of dead. With his connivance the Mahant's men continued burning the dead till 4.30 p.m.
  89. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 22 February 1921.
  90. Jhabbar, op. cit., p. 121. This account contains an interesting dialogue between Jathedar Jhabbar and the Deputy Commissioner and other British officials, pp. 122-4.
  91. An ex-Honorary Magistrate and ex-President of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Harbans Singh Attari belonged to the group of moderate Sikhs and was a close associate of S.B. Sundar Singh Majithia. D. Petric, Secret C.I.D. Memorandum on *Some Recent Developments in Sikh Politics*. Appendix, 'Leading Personages in Sikh Politics'.
  92. *The Akali*, 24 February, 1921; *The Sikh*, 24 February 1921, *Bande Matram*, 2 March 1921; *The Khalsa Advocate*, 25 February 1921; *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIX, 397-8.
  93. *The Brahman Samachar*, 9 March 1921 and the *Vedic Magazine*, March 1921.
  94. *The Tribune*, 1 March 1921.
  95. *Ibid.*, March 1 and 2.
  96. *Ibid.*
  97. For the English translation of the text of his speech see *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIX, pp. 397-8.
  98. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 82. *The Tribune* gives the date of the Mahatma's visit as 1 March and quotes the news in its issue of 2 March, while in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Vol. XIX, p. 397) the date is given as 3 March. The Akali sources repeatedly mention about Mahatma's visit but do not give the exact date. *The Civil and Military Gazette* has quoted the Mahatma's advice to the Akalis in its issue of 8 March 1921.
  99. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIX, p. 401.
  100. *Ibid.*, pp. 420-1; The Sikh League expressed lack of confidence in the official Enquiry Committee and appointed an unofficial Committee with Mahatma Gandhi as Chairman and Sardar Kharak Singh and S. Jaswant Singh Jhabbal as members. But as the Mahatma refused to act on the Committee another one was suggested which had



- Dr. Salf-ud-din Kitchlew as Chairman and Baba Kharak Singh, Prof. Ruchi Ram Sahni, Sardar Sujan Singh and Sardar Sant Singh as members. *The Tribune*, 13 March and 17 April 1921.
101. Baba Kartar Singh Bedi, son of Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi of Rawalpindi, was a big landlord of Montgomery district and an intimate associate of Mahant Narain Das. He had great influence with the British officials in the Panjab and was an Honorary Captain, a Civil Judge and an Honorary Magistrate and also a nominated Member of the Panjab Legislative Council. It was he who arranged a meeting of all the Mahants at Lahore on 19-20 February 1921 to decide a common programme against the Akali Movement. During its early phase he worked against the movement and helped the authorities in the Panjab. It was because of his anti-Akali activities that he was declared a *Tankhahia*. But towards the end of 1923 he changed his loyalty over to the Akalis and after getting his *Tankhah* (sin) remitted at Akal Takhat again became a popular religious leader of the Sikhs. "
  102. P.L.C. *Proceedings*, March 1921.
  103. Fortnightly Reports on the Political Situation in File No. 179-II/1922 Home-Political, Government of India, N.A.I.
  104. *Ibid.*
  105. Statement of Mahant Narain Das in File No. 179-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  106. Letter from C.M. King to Baba Kartar Singh Bedi, quoted earlier.
  107. *Ibid.*
  108. Evidence in the *Nankana Case*, *Proceedings in The Civil and Military Gazette*, 8 August 1921
  109. File No. 179-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  110. Judgment quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 28 December 1921.
  111. Letter dated 4 May 1921 from Edwin Samuel Montague to Lord Reading. Quoted in the *Reading Papers*. Mss. Eur. E 238, Vol. III (Microfilms in the Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi).
  112. Note by Lord Reading on the petition of Mahant Narain Das, in File No. 179-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  113. Note by John Maynard, Home Member, Panjab. File No. 179-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  114. *Ibid.*
  115. *Ibid.*
  116. D.O Letter from S.P. O'Donnel to Mr. Trench, File 282-315 & KW.
  117. P.L.C. *Proceedings*, March 1921.

### Chapter 3

1. *The Akali*, 10 November 1921.
2. *Panth Sewak*, Combined issue November 9-16, 1921.



3. *The Akali*, 20 November 1921.
4. *Bande Matram*, 26 November 1921. For other newspaper comments see Panjab Press Abstract for the fortnight ending 30 November 1921, N.A.I. New Delhi
5. Report by Sant Singh, D.S.P. Criminal Intelligence, File No. 459/1921; I-17/1921, Home-Political, N.A.I.
6. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 22 November 1921.
7. Summary of News from Col. C. Kaye to S P O'Donnel dated 16 November 1921, File 459/1921.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid*
10. *Ibid.* According to the report, three Sikh constables of the Railway Police had resigned on non-cooperation grounds.
11. *Ibid*, Note by H.D. Craik, dated 26 November 1921.
12. *The Akali*, 29 November 1921.
13. *Ibid.*, Among others arrested were Teja Singh Samundri, Zaildar Harnam Singh and Pandit Dina Nath, Secretary of the District Congress Committee, Ajnala, text of the judgment quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 4 December 1921.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid*
16. *The Akali* dated 30 November 1921 Those arrested included S. Kharak Singh, President of S.G.P.C., S. Mehtab Singh, Secretary, Master Sunder Singh Lyallpur, Bhag Singh, Gurcharan Singh and Hari Singh.
17. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 14 October 1921
18. C.I.D. Report quoted in File No. 459/1921.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *The Akali*, 2 December 1921.
21. *Ibid.*
22. C.I.D. Report dated 13 December 1921 in File No. 459/1921.
23. *The Akali*, 15 November 1921.
24. Quoted in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXII, p 170.
25. *Ibid*, pp. 208-9
26. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 2 December 1921.
27. Panjab Government Communique 12 January 1922, File No. 459-II/1922.
28. Komma, 'The Sikh Situation in the Punjab', *Fortnightly Review* September 1923.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Confidential Papers of Akali Movement*, p. 11.
31. Panjab Government Communique, 12 January 1922, File-459/II/1922. Home-Political, N.A.I.
32. Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar: arthat Akali Lehar*, p. 142.
33. *The Civil and Military Gazette* (4 December 1921) gives the following account:



'Sardar Kharak Singh asked whether the case against him was by the Government, and being told that it was, he said that as the Government was the prosecutor and the court its servant, he did not want to make any statement to the court, because a party could not arrogate to itself the functions of a judge. The accused's position as President of the Panth (the Sikh Nation) was similar to that of the United States of America, France and Germany'. This is confirmed by most of the contemporary accounts such as the *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, the *Gurdwara Sudhar*, *Akali Morchian da Itihas* and *Baba Kharak Singh Abhinandan Granth*.

34. Court Proceedings in the case *Crown v. Kharak Singh and others*, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 4 December 1922.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. According to *The Civil and Military Gazette* 15 February 1922 Master Tara Singh and other extremists in the Akali leadership threatened to persuade the students of the Khalsa College, Amritsar to go on strike in case the Managing Committee of the College invited the prince. Therefore, the College authorities had to give up the plan of welcoming the prince to the College.
39. Situated in village Ghokewala of Ajnala Tehsil and about twenty kilometers from Amritsar, Guru-ka-Bagh is built in memory of two Sikh Gurus—Arjun Dev and Tegh Bahadur. The place was initially known as Guru-ka-Raur but later, after a garden was planted on the bare land by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the name was changed to Guru-ka-Bagh. Evidence of Wadhawa Singh in the case *Crown v. Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh and others* quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 21, November 1922.
40. According to an eyewitness, the Mahant was keeping two mistresses, Isro and Jagdei, and had illegitimate relations with other women of bad reputation. (Evidence of Zaildar Harnam Singh in the case given in Note 39)
41. C.I.D. Report by Hakim Iquram-ul-Haq, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 396-7
42. According to the terms of the agreement the Mahant had agreed to (i) take Amrit, (ii) marry one of his mistresses and (iii) serve under the committee. He is said to have fulfilled all the conditions by taking amrit on 8 February 1921 (and was renamed Joginder Singh) marrying Isro (Ishri) according to Sikh rites (she was renamed Gian Kaur) and agreed to serve under a Committee of Management appointed by the S.G.P.C. Evidence of Bhagat Jaswant Singh in the case *Crown v. S.B. Mehtab Singh and others*, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 9 September 1922.
43. In Panjab Government's statement regarding Guru-ka-Bagh, the land is mentioned as a garden with a plantation of mango, kikkar and other trees and a 'considerable extent of valuable agricultural



- land' (File No. 914/1922). This is challenged by Teja Singh the author of the *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, who writes 'the land is not and has never been valuable agricultural land but a mere grove of kikkar trees for which no revenue had ever been paid' (p. 399).
44. The Mahant was offered the following terms under the new compromise: (i) a salary of Rs. 120 per month and (ii) a house at Amritsar. Both the terms he accepted. *Proceedings in the Sikh Leaders' case*, quoted in *The Tribune*, 27 September 1922.
  45. File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  46. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 399.
  47. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 13 September. 1922.
  48. Sohan Singh, Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 157.
  49. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 399, Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reforms in Sikh Shrines*.
  50. File No. 459-II/1922, Home-Political, N.I.A.
  51. Quoted in the P.L.C. *Proceedings*, March 1922, Vol. IV, pp. 470-71. See Appendix-II.
  52. S.G.P.C. Communique No. 18, dated 23 August 1922.
  53. S.G.P.C. Communique No. 29, dated 30 August 1922.
  54. *Ibid*
  55. *Ibid*
  56. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 14 September 1922. Later the Swami was arrested and tried for his speech in the Diwan that all the Hindus and the Muslims were with the Akalis and if the S.G.P.C. orders many Hindus and Muslims from the United Provinces were ready to come and offer themselves for arrest at Guru-ka-Bagh. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 21 September 1921.
  57. Mr. Verges was later approached through the higher authorities in London not to show the film in India or the United States.
  58. C.I.D. Reports in File No. 949/1922; *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 14 September 1922.
  59. Rev. C.F. Andrews was born on 12 February 1871 in Newcastle-on-Tyne and died on 5 April 1940 in Calcutta. He had come to India as a Missionary but being impressed by the Indian culture and values he seems to have changed his loyalties to India. Because of his frank criticism of the excesses of some of the lower officials of the British Government and his love for the poor and down-trodden he was popularly called Dina-Bandhu. He supported the Indian struggle for freedom and national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru held him in high regard. For details on his life and activities see P.C. Roy Chaudhury, *C.F. Andrews: The Life and Times* (Somaiya Publications, Bombay, 1971) and *C.F. Andrews Centenary Volume*, Calcutta, 1972. See Appendix IV.
  60. File No. 614-II/1922.
  61. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 171-2.
  62. File No. 914/1922.
  63. *Ibid*.



64. *Ibid*
65. D.O letter dated 20 September 1922 from H D Craik to S.P. O'Donnel.
66. File No. 914/1922, Home-Political N.A.I.
67. *Ibid*.
68. Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 146
69. *Ibid*
70. Macpherson and Illford Derrick, *The Lathi and How to Use it* (Given in Appendix III of the *Congress Enquiry Committee Report* on Guru-ka-Bagh).
71. Joint Statement of Press Representatives published in *The Tribune*, 4 October 1922.
72. Confidential Note dated 7 September 1922 by a C I D. official Bhagwan Das, File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A I.
73. Reports by Bhagwan Das and other C.I D. officials.
74. Apart from the old registers in the Panjab State Archives and in the personal collection of Dr Ganda Singh, Patiala, Fortnightly and C.I D reports also confirm the above view.
75. Telegram No D. 8046, dated 25 September 1922 from the Viceroy to His Majesty's Secretary of State for India File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A I
76. *Ibid*, the following Members attended the Conference:
  1. Lord Reading, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India.
  2. William Vincent, Home Member.
  3. Sir Malcolm Hailey, Finance Member.
  4. Dr Tej Bahadur Sapru, Law Member.
  5. Sir Edward Maclagan, Governor of Panjab.
  6. John Maynard, Finance Member (Panjab).
  7. Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, Revenue Member.
  8. Mian Fazl-i-Husain, Education Member.
  9. Lala Harkishan Lal, Agriculture Member.
  10. H D Craik, Chief Secretary, Panjab, in attendance.
77. File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
78. *Ibid*
79. *Ibid*
80. *Ibid*
81. S.G P.C Communique No. 183.
82. *The Tribune*, 4 October 1922.
83. The Sub-Committee consisted of the following Members:
  1. S Srinivas Iyenger, ex-Advocate General, Madras High Court (President),
  2. J M Sen-Gupta, Barrister, Calcutta,
  3. S E. Stokes,
  4. Muhammad Taqui,
  5. M V. Abhink, and
  6. Ruchi Ram Sahni (Secretary).
84. *The Tribune*, 4 October 1922 and *The Akali*, 11 September 1922.



85. *Congress Enquiry Committee Report.*
86. Beating of the Akalis at Guru-ka-Bagh was witnessed by the representatives of the papers like *Manchester Guardian*, *London Times* and *National Herald* and the *Hind*. Quoted in the Panjab Press Abstracts, 1922. As pointed out earlier, Capt. A.L. Verges, an American cinematographer, greatly exposed the police highhandedness and prepared a short film entitled 'Exclusive Picture of India's Martyrdom'. File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
87. Note dated 17 November 1922 by S.P. O'Donnel, File No. 914/1922; Pyarelal Bedi, *Harvest from the Desert: The Life and Work of Sir Ganga Ram*, p. 253.
88. Statement of Mr. H.D. Craik in reply to a question by M. Ganpat Singh in the Punjab Legislative Council, *Proceedings*, 1922, Vol. IV, pp. 468-9; *The Akali Darshan* gives the figures of arrested as 5603.
89. File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
90. S.G.P.C. Communique No. 250 Government announced the settlement of the dispute on 9 November 1922 while the above-mentioned Communique had appeared on 4 November 1922.
91. P.L.C. *Proceedings*, November 1922.
92. H.D. Craik mentioned the fact of a public-spirited man being helped and encouraged by officials in his letter to S.P. O'Donnel (File No. 914/1922) and John Maynard admitted in the course of his speech in Panjab Legislative Council in November 1922. Vol. IV, pp. 590-1.
93. Shiv Narain Mishar, *Akali Darshan* pp. 91-4.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 93; Pyarelal Bedi, *Harvest from the Desert*, p. 253.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*
97. It is not relevant here to discuss the details of the causes leading to Hindu-Muslim riots. For details see Ruchi Ram Sahn, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines* (chapter on Hindu-Muslim Riots at Amritsar), pp. 96-99.
98. *Ibid.*
99. D.O. letter No 13722-Judl, dated 23 April 1923, from H.D. Craik, Chief Secretary, Panjab, to J. Crerar, Home Department. Government of India, File No. 112-II/1923, Home-Political, N.A.I.
100. File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N A I.

## Chapter 4

1. For a detail account of the Phulkian States see Lepel H. Griffin, *The Rajas of the Punjab*, Delhi, 1919.
2. Some spade-work in this direction has been initiated by the Punjabi University at Patiala. Apart from M.A. dissertations on *Formation and Development of Parja Mandal in Patiala State* (Joginder Singh) and *Tenants Movement in the Patiala State* (Mrs. Jaspal Kaur), a



scholar, late Dr. Ramesh Walia received Ph. D. degree on *The Parja Mandal Movement*. Gursharan Singh's M.A. dissertation on *The Akali Movement in the Phulkian States (1920-1938)* is another pioneering attempt in this direction.

3. While the Akali struggle in the Panjab was over in 1925 with the passage of the *Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill*, the movement in the States continued up to 1938 and ultimately led to the formation of the Riyasti Parja Mandal in the Sikh States. See for details Ramesh Walia, *The Parja Mandal Movement in the Patiala and East Panjab States Union*.
4. See for a detailed account about the circumstances leading to Maharaja's abdication, author's paper on 'The Nature of the Abdication of the Maharaja of Nabha', read at the Panjab History Conference at Patiala, November
5. The Maharaja seems to have had a bad start. His succession to the throne was marked by a conflict with the British officials, C.H. Atkins, the Political Agent and Sir Louise Dane, the Lt. Governor of the Panjab. While the Government insisted that he should be placed on the throne through the Political Agent, Ripudaman Singh objected to this procedure. He asserted that his succession to the throne was a matter of right and needed no British sanction or ceremony.
6. Note dated 29 January 1924 in File No. 628-3-P/1924, Foreign-Political, N.A.I.
7. A Commission of Enquiry was set up by the Government of India under the Chairmanship of Mr. Justice Stuart, to enquire into the Patiala-Nabha dispute (over certain territories, extradition of offenders, murder of one Lal Singh and disappearance of a woman named Ishar Kaur, etc.) Out of eight charges against Nabha, six were proved and accepted as correct by the Viceroy. For details see *Findings of the Stuart Enquiry Commission*, in 3 Vols. in File No. 298 (Nabha Records) at the Panjab State Archives, Patiala; Lord Reading's remarks on the findings in File No. 628-3P, Foreign-Political, N.A.I. and Barbara Ramusack's 'The Incident at Nabha', *Journal of Asiatic Studies*,
8. Letter dated 21 April 1923 from Narsingha Rao to G.D. Ogilvie. File No. 628-3-P, Foreign-Political, N.A.I.
9. Under the conditions initially decided, the Maharaja was to retain the salute and the titles; he was to live outside the State; was formally to abdicate when his son came to age; the heir was to remain in the charge of the Regency Government; Nabha was to pay Rs. 50 lakhs to Patiala as compensation and was to retain certain houses for his own use. It was agreed that once 'these terms are approved and the Maharaja severs his connections with the administration, no further action would be taken against him in the light of findings of the Stuart Enquiry Committee'. For further



- details see note dated 7 June 1923 in File No. 628-3-P, Foreign-Political, N A.I.
10. According to Lord Reading, the Maharaja sent his telegram accepting the above terms (a reference made by the Viceroy in his speech at Chelmsford Club, Simla on 29 October 1923). Letter dated 14 December 1923 from His Highness the Maharaja of Nabha to His Excellency Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India, File No. 18 (Nabha Records), Panjab State Archives, Patiala; also in the Reading Papers at the India Office Library, London, MSS. Eur. E 235/25, pp. 544 'a' to 'h'.
  11. *Ibid.*
  12. In the first instance Peel questioned the policy of the Government of India in permitting Nabha to retire from the administration of his State without thorough investigations of highly irregular conditions described in Stuart's Report. But later he agreed to Government of India's policy for reasons of expediency but added further conditions to those settled by the Government of India. Telegrams dated 12 June 1923 from Reading to Peel; Peel to Reading, 14 June, Reading to Peel, 17 June and Peel to Reading 19 June, File No. 628-3-P-1924, Foreign-Political, N.A.I.
  13. Statement of Master Tara Singh in *Akali Leaders Case*, Vol. I, pp. 111-4, Report of meeting between Maharaja Ripudaman Singh and the Akali Deputation, p. 114 of the *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*.
  14. Ripudaman Singh's undated letter to the S.G.P.C. *Confidential Papers*, p. 173.
  15. Cavechhar Papers in Nehru Memorial Library; personal interview with Maharani Gurcharan Kaur of Nabha.
  16. Statement of S.A. Dighe in the Files of the 'History of Freedom Movement in the Panjab', Patiala.
  17. See for details *Native Press Abstracts*, (Panjab) June 1923 to March 1924, particularly *Akali-te-Pardesi*, *Kirpan Bahadur*, *Bande Matram*, *The Tribune*, in the N A.I. and also cuttings from the papers like *Sachha Dhandora*, *Daler-i-Hind*, *Bir Akali* and *Qaumi Dard*, etc., in the personal collection of Dr. Ganda Singh, Patiala.
  18. Simon de Montfort (Earl of Leicester, 1208-1265) though acquitted of the charges of oppressions had yet to yield to the demand of jealous Henry III for his resignation. For long he was popularly revered as a martyr and saint, known as 'Simon the Righteous', *Webster's Biographical Dictionary*, p. 1040.
  19. The *Hukamnama* (Guru's order), now preserved in the Panjab Government Museum at Patiala, was issued by Guru Gobind Singh to Bhai Rama and Bhai Tiloka. For details about the *Hukamnama* see Rotary Club of Patiala *Sewa Chakra* (special number on *Baba Ala Singh*).
  20. Telegram No. P-799-S, dated 12 June 1923 from His Excellency the



- Viceroy to His Majesty's Secretary of State for India, File No. 628-3-P/1924, Foreign-Political, N.A.I.
21. *Ibid.* Note dated 29 January 1924.
  22. Letter dated 7 July 1924 from Minchin to Ogilvie.
  23. *Ibid.*
  24. *The Akali*, 13 August 1923 also *Kirpan Bahadur*, *Qaumi Dard* and the *Bir Akali* (from a file of newspaper cuttings, P.S.A.)
  25. *Ibid.*
  26. *The Nation*, 15 August 1923.
  27. *The Kesri*, August 1923.
  28. *Ibid.*
  29. *Proceedings* of the Cocanada Session of the Indian National Congress 31 December 1923, Nehru Memorial Library.
  30. Bhai Jodh Singh was particularly against the S.G.P.C. taking up the Nabha issue as he felt it was a purely political issue and as such should not be taken up by the S.G.P.C. Author's personal interview with Bhai Jodh Singh.
  31. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 22 August 1924.
  32. *Ibid.*
  33. Statement of S A. Dighe in the file of the 'History of Freedom Movement' in the Punjabi University, Patiala.
  34. Cuttings from the newspapers regarding Nabha in the collection of Dr. Ganda Singh, Files No. 64-68, 70-71.
  35. *Ibid.*
  36. Shiromani Akali Dal Resolutions quoted in File No. 628-3-P, Foreign-Political/1924, N.A.I.
  37. *Akali-te-Pardesi*, quoted in the above-mentioned File, p. 30.
  38. *Akali-te-Pardesi*, 9 July 1923.
  39. Press Communique No. 5, 9 July 1923.
  40. *Ibid.*
  41. The Sikh community of Delhi held a big demonstration in favour of the Maharaja, marched through the principal streets barefooted and with black flags and banners 'Truth will Triumph'. They were escorted by the Hindus and Muslims. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 12 September 1923.
  42. Press Communique No. 5, 9 July 1923.
  43. S.G.P.C. Communique 10 July 1923 quoted in File No. 623-3-P, pp. 183-4.
  44. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
  45. File No. 82 & K.W./1925, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  46. Out of 175 members only six voted against the move. Mark the contrast. In the beginning the majority was in favour of a 'moderate line of action'. But in a period of less than a month Akali leadership was able to mobilise public opinion through press and platform for a strong and immediate action. The moderates were thus elbowed to fall in line with the extremists.
  47. File No. 628-3-P, Foreign-Political, N.A.I.; *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 24 November 1923.



48. S.G.P.C. Resolution quoted in Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*.
49. File No. 401/1924, Home-Political, N.A.I.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. After the abdication of the Maharaja the administration of the State was put under the charge of a British Administrator. Later the Governor of Panjab agreed to the appointment of a Council of Regency during the minority of Maharaja's son Partap Singh. According to Bhai Jodh Singh, the Government had informally agreed with him that the Council would have a Sikh President and the majority of its members would be Sikhs. But as the Akali leadership did not want anything short of the restoration of the Maharaja, the proposal for a Council of Regency fell through and the British Administrator continued to be in the saddle. At the time of the Akali morcha at Jaito, Wilson-Johnston, who was earlier the Chief Secretary to the Government in Panjab, was the Administrator. *Confidential Papers*, pp. 298-9 and S.G.P.C. Communique No. 9, 17 August 1923.
53. For details see File No. 28 (Nabha Records) in the P.S.A.
54. *Ibid.*, File No. 70.
55. *Ibid.*, for detailed Resolutions. On the basis of a personal interview with Inder Singh of Mor and Pritam Singh of Kila Raipur.
56. According to the reports sent by Wilson-Johnston, Administrator of Nabha, to the Chief Secretary of the Panjab, the organisers of the Diwan had called upon the Sikhs to 'assemble and turn out the British dacoits who had seized the State and forcibly expelled the Maharaja. . . .' D.O. letter dated 7 September 1923 from Wilson-Johnston to C.A.H. Townsend, Chief Secretary, Panjab, File No. 628-3-P, Foreign-Political, N.A.I.
57. The report submitted by the Nazim of Phool (Zora Singh), who witnessed the proceedings of the Diwan and was reporting the events to the Administrator at Nabha, is very relevant in this context, 'The Diwan might have dispersed had not Inder Singh been arrested. Now they have determined to remain here until the departure of state forces. I have also come to know that they have got some promises of help from the S.G.P.C. If it is so, the agitation will not be put down easily.' File No. 70 (Nabha Records) at P.S.A. Patiala.
58. *Ibid.*
59. **DISRUPTION OF THE AKHAND PATH**  
There are divergent views about the disruption of the Akhand Path at Jaito. The S.G.P.C. alleged that the 'armed soldiers in uniform literally dragged the man reading the Granth' (*The Tribune*, 18 September 1923). The official version contradicts the Akali charge. According to the Statement of Gurdial Singh, Assistant Administrator of Nabha, published in the *Pioneer*, 6 October 1923, 'The



Path was not interrupted even for a second. The Akali who was reciting at the time was asked to leave his place when our man had taken his seat by the side of the Akali and had begun the recital... 'Nazim of Phool and evidence of Mir Muhammad Ali, in the case Crown v. Mehtab Singh and others, mention the name of Bhai Atma Singh, who took over the Path from Inder Singh (*The Civil and Military Gazette*, 16 January 1924). The evidence of the Superintendent of Police, Nabha, in the court of Lala Amar Nath, Sessions Judge, Nabha also confirms the above view (*The Civil and Military Gazette*, 16 May 1924).

From the perusal of the initial official reports about the incident it appears that the Path had come to be disturbed in the process of the State soldiers trying to remove the Akalis from the place where the Path was going on. From the letter of Wilson-Johnston, the Administrator of Nabha, to the Viceroy about the incident: 'The place where they were holding the Diwan is now turned into a camping ground for our soldiers. Sri Guru Granth Sahib was removed and taken to the Dharmshala with all honours by five Sikh soldiers who were ready for the purpose beforehand. . . . ' The fact that the Granth Sahib was removed establishes that the reading of the Akhand Path (which means continuous reading without even a minute's break) had come to stop for some time—for the period it was stopped from the Diwan to its resumption in the Dharmshala. It appears that at a later stage, when the officials realised the serious consequences that had resulted from their action, they issued statements in the press that 'the Path was not interrupted even for a second'. Gurdial Singh's statement in the *Pioneer* is dated 6 October while Johnston's letter was written on 1 October 1923, (D.O.H.C.D.L., dated 1 October 1923) File No. 628-P-3, Foreign-Political, N.A.I.

60. S.G.P.C. Communique No. 94, undated.
61. File No. 1/II/1924/Home-Political, N.A.I.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. Secretary of State for India's telegram dated 18 October 1922 quoted in File No. 614/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I. For details see Chapter 5 of this book.
65. To avoid repetition details of the circumstances leading to the S.G.P.C., Shiromani Akali Dal, etc., being declared 'unlawful associations' are not discussed here. These are discussed in Chapter 5 of this book.
66. Punjab Government's Press Communique dated 15 October 1923, quoted from the PLC *Proceedings*, October 1923, Vol. VII, 276-7.
67. Order No. 23772 (Home-Judicial) quoted from File No. 28 (Nabha Records) P.S.A., Patiala. See Appendix II of this book.
68. Akali Leaders' case, quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette*.
69. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of the World History*, p. 747.



70. Giani Nahar Singh, 'Akali Lehar', *Panjab*, p. 228.
71. Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 223.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. Letter dated 11 February 1924 from the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar to the Commissioner, Lahore Division.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *The Milap*, 20 February 1924, quoted in the Native Press Reports (Panjab) 1924.
77. Statement of Mr. Zimand, *Quarterly Register*, April 1924. Also statements of Messrs. Niranjan Singh, Sodhi Jagat Singh, Sepoy Kishan Singh, Jathedar Jiwan Singh and Sewa Singh, etc.
78. File No. 1/II, 1924, Home-Political, N.A.I.
79. *Ibid.*
80. S. Zimand's letter to Mahatma Gandhi dated 9 April 1924, quoted in the *Quarterly Register*, April, 1924. See Appendix VI of this book.
81. *Loyal Gazette; The Onward and the Hariana Tilak*, 24 February 1924 quoted from the Native Press Abstracts, 1924.
82. Letter of S. Zimand to Mahatma Gandhi quoted earlier.
83. *Quarterly Register*, April 1924.
84. S.G.P.C.'s *Struggle for Freedom of Religious Worship at Jaito*, p. 8.
85. Statement of Messrs. Mahinder Singh, Harbans Singh and Bhagat Singh quoted in the *Quarterly Register*, April 1924.
86. *Ibid.*, Statement of Mr. Gulab Singh.
87. S.G.P.C.'s *Struggle for Freedom of Religious Worship at Jaito*, p. 9.
88. *Akali-te-Pardesi*, 9 March 1924. *Zamindar* of 25 February, 1924 wrote that 'even a machine-gun was used at Jaito'. S.G.P.C. Communique quoted in File No. 180/1924, Home-Political, N.A.I.
89. Report of the Judicial Magistrate (Balwant Singh) quoted in the *Quarterly Register*, April 1924; Also File No. 210 (Chief Minister, Nabha) in the Panjab State Archives, Patiala.
90. *Onward*, 24 February 1924.
91. *Loyal Gazette*, 24 February 1924.
92. *Akali-te-Pardesi*, 25 February 1924.
93. *Kesri*, 25 February 1924.
94. *Bharat*, 25 February 1924 (all quoted from the Native Press Abstracts, February 1924).
95. *Bande Matram*, 29 February 1924.
96. Report of the Indian National Congress about Jaito Firing,
97. Mahatma Gandhi sent the following message on this occasion, 'I need hardly assure the Akali Sikhs of my sympathy in the loss of so many brave men and many more being wounded. . . .' *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXIII, p. 211.
98. Proceedings of the Cocanada Session of the Indian National Congress, quoted in *The Tribune*, 2 January 1924 and *The Akali*, 1-2 January 1924.



99. 'Report of the Enquiry Committee,' quoted in the *Quarterly Register* April 1924.
100. *Ibid.*
101. S. Zimand's letter dated London 9 April 1924, addressed to Mahatma Gandhi, quoted in the *Quarterly Register*, April 1924.
102. Report of the Akali Sahayak Bureau, issued by the Secretary, Indian National Congress. Records in the Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi.
103. For details of the correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi and the Akali leadership see Ganda Singh (Ed.) *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, pp. 45-55.
104. Letter dated 23 August 1924, from W. Malcolm Hailey, Governor of the Panjab, to De Montmorency, Private Secretary to the Viceroy of India, New Delhi, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/8-A.
105. *Ibid.*, Letter dated 28 February 1924, from W. Malcolm Hailey to Malcolm Seton, India Office, London.
106. Telegram No. 00629, dated 19 March 1925 from the Viceroy to Hailey in *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 228/7-A No. P & N Clair (No. 293) dated 19 March in *Reading Papers*, Mss Eur 238/27.
107. Hailey's letter dated 3 March 1924, to Edward MacLagan, Mss Eur E 220/6-A.
108. File No. 195 (Nabha State Records), Panjab State Archives, Patiala.
109. Extract from the Speech of Sir Malcolm Hailey made in the Panjab Legislative Council on 9 July 1925. For details see Proceedings.
110. D.O. letter No. C-56-J, dated 22 July 1925, from Wislson-Johnston, Administrator Nabha to J. Crerar, File 120/III/1925, Home-Political, N.A.I.
111. File No. 112-IV/1926, Home-Political, N.A.I.
112. Letter dated 4 March 1924, from Mahatma Gandhi to the Secretary, S.G.P.C., Ganda Singh (Ed.), *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, p. 53.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
114. *Ibid.*
115. *Ibid.*
116. *Ibid.*
117. *Ibid.*
118. Telegram No. P-799-S, dated 12 June 1923, from His Excellency the Viceroy to His Majesty's Secretary of State for India, quoted in File No. 628-3-P, Foreign-Political, 1924, N.A.I.
119. Letter of Mahatma Gandhi to the Akali leaders, quoted in Ganda Singh (Ed.), *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, p. 55.
120. The Akali leadership's silence over the Nabha issue was viewed with great satisfaction in the official circles. Writing to Alexander Muddiman, Hailey observed, 'You will, I am sure, note with interest that among numerous conditions of peace embodied in the resolution of the Committee, there is no mention of the unfortunate



- Maharaja of Nabha'. Letter dated 2 May 1925 in the *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/7-B, I.O.L., London.
121. For text of the letter see Ganda Singh (Ed ), *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, pp. 172-4.
  122. *Census Report*, 1921. For a detailed account, see Mohammed Hassan's *Tarikh-i-Patiala* (manuscript) in the P.S.A. and S.N. Banerjee's *History of Patiala*, 2 Vols. (Typescript) in the collection of Dr. Ganda Singh, Lower Mall, Patiala.
  123. For a detailed account of the Maharaja's evil actions, see File 'where the Maharaja takes away a married woman and offers Rs. 5,000/- to her husband'. *Indictment of Patiala*, and the Memorial submitted by the Riyasti Parja Mandal and the All-India Peoples' Conference to the Viceroy of India. P.S.A., Patiala.
  124. His other titles were Major General, H.H. Saman-Amir-Ul-Umra Maharaja Dhiraj Rajeshwar Shri Maharaja-i-Rajgan Sir Bhupinder Singh, Mahendra Bahadur, etc. See author's article 'Patiala Past and Present' *Punjabi University Bulletin*, January 1966.
  125. For a detailed account of the Patiala State's measures to combat the Akali Movement and activities of the Akalis in the Patiala State, see Sir Daya Kishan, Prime Minister, Patiala State's Note in the *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, pp. 183-92.
  126. Note on the services rendered by Patiala in combating the dangerous Sikh agitation and the Akali Movement in the Panjab. File No. 125 Serial No. 538, Basta No. 18 in the Patiala Records (Prime Minister's Office) P.S.A.
  127. *Ibid.*
  128. *Ibid.*
  129. File No. 459/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I. For details of the formation of the Committee see Chapter 3 of this book.
  130. File No. 401/1923, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  131. Jhabbar, *Akali Morche-te-Jhabbar*.
  132. Note on the services of Patiala State, quoted in the *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, pp. 179-80.
  133. *Ibid.*
  134. *Ibid.*
  135. *Ibid.*, File 254/1924, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  136. *Patiala Darpan*, p. 74.
  137. Same as Note (11).
  138. *Ibid.*
  139. Gurcharan Singh, *Jiwan Sardar Sewa Singh Thikriwala*, pp. 27-6.
  140. *Ibid.*
  141. *Ibid.*
  142. *Ibid.*
  143. File 76 at the Panjab State Archives, Patiala.
  144. Gurcharan Singh, op. cit.
  145. Notification dated February 1924 issued under the orders of His



- Highness by the Home Minister. File No. 125. Patiala Records in the Panjab State Archives, Patiala.
146. Gurcharan Singh, op. cit., pp. 29-30.
  147. Maharaja's letter dated 29 May 1925, to Malcolm Hailey and Hailey's reply dated 17 June 1925, in the *Hailey Papers*, Mss. Eur. E 220/7/B.
  148. Founded by Raja Gajpat Singh, the Jind State had an area of 1268 sq. miles and population of 308, 183 and was being ruled by Maharaja Ranbir Singh at the time of Akali Movement, *Census Reports* for 1921.
  149. File No. 100 in the Panjab State Archives contains the names of about a dozen villages which hosted the Akali Diawns.
  150. For details see, Ramesh Walia, *Parja Mandal Movement in P.E.P.S.U.*, Panjab University, Patiala.

## Chapter 5

1. *Confidential Memorandum* on the Shiromani Akali Dal and the S.G.P.C., gives 16 November 1920 as the date which seems to be incorrect compared to the S.G.P.C. records and other contemporary accounts. Jhabbar, *Akali Morche-te-Jhabbar*, p. 73. *Shahidi Jiwan*, p. 29.
2. *Confidential Memorandum*, File 459/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Jhabbar, op. cit., p. 73.
5. File No. 459/1922. In the *Confidential Memorandum* the number of members is given as 179 while the biographical account of Jathedar Jhabbar, *Gurdwara Reform Movement* and the S.G.P.C. sources put the figures at 175. My enquiries from the present leadership of the S.G.P.C. have revealed that the latter figure, i.e., 175, is correct.
6. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 165.
7. Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, a big landlord of Majitha (near Amritsar) had earned the displeasure of the Sikh community because of his pro-British attitude and his condemnation of the Sikh Ghadrites (Jhabbar, op. cit., p. 74). Sunder Singh Ramgarhia was the Government-appointed Sarbrah of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, Sardar Harbans Singh Attari was a moderate Sikh chief of village Attari, District Amritsar. See short biographical notes on Harbans Singh Attari and Sunder Singh Majithia in the Secret C.I.D. *Memorandum* on some recent developments in Sikh politics, Appendix A, Leading Personages in Sikh Politics.

From the perusal of the biographical account of Kartar Singh Jhabbar it appears that the moderate Sikh leadership was keen to capture the newly formed S.G.P.C. so as to use it as a base to bargain for high offices in the Government. While supporting the candidature of Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia for the Presidentship of the S.G.P.C., Bhai Jodh Singh is said to have argued that



- Majithia's election as President would strengthen his claims for the membership of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Jhabbar, op. cit., pp. 73-4.
8. The priests tried to instigate the Nihangs against the reformers but a near-clash was averted as a result of mediation of Baba Kehar Singh of Patti.
  9. *Confidential Memorandum*, File 459/1922, Home-Political N.A.I.
  10. Jhabbar, op. cit., Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*. For details see Chapter 2, of the book.
  11. C.I.D. reports in File 459/II 1922, Home-Political N.A.I.
  12. *Confidential Memorandum*.
  13. File 492/1922.
  14. *Ibid*.
  15. *Ibid*.
  16. The new constitution guaranteed voting right to all Sikhs above 21 years of age who observed elementary rules of Sikh conduct, i.e., rising early in the morning, reading Sikh scriptures, giving 1/10th of the income in charity and keeping baptismal vow of five K's, Giani Nahar Singh, 'Akali Lehar' in the *Punjab*, Vol. II, pp. 220-1.
  17. Born in June 1868, Kharak Singh belonged to a well-to-do family of Sialkot. He entered public life in 1912 when he was elected Chairman of the Reception Committee of the 5th Sikh Educational Conference held in Sialkot. It was during the Akali struggle for reform of Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber at Sialkot that he joined the Akali Movement and thereafter remained the central figure in the Akali politics till 1935 when he was replaced by Master Tara Singh. He came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders during the non-cooperation movement in 1920; organised the Central Sikh League, a purely political body of the Sikhs, and remained a staunch non-cooperator and a nationalist till the end. Because of his unique sacrifices and leadership he earned the popular title of *Betaj Badshah* (uncrowned king) of the Panth. He died on 6 October 1962. For a detailed account see *Baba Kharak Singh Abhinandan Granth*.
  18. Prominent Members of the Executive Committee were: Teja Singh Samundri, Amar Singh and Jaswant Singh Jhabbal, Sardar Dan Singh Vachhoa, Master Tara Singh, Teja Singh of Chuharkana, Bhagat Jaswant Singh of Rawalpindi, Sarmukh Singh Jhabbal, Bawa Harkishan Singh, Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri (Editor of *The Akali*), etc. For further details about the members see *Confidential Memorandum*.
  19. For details see Chapter 3 of this book.
  20. *Proceedings* of the Cocanada Session, N.M.M.L.
  21. Resolutions of the Sikh League, Amritsar, Coronation Printing Works, Amritsar, 1920.
  22. Quoted from the S.G.P.C. communiques in the Personal collection of Dr. Ganda Singh.



23. This is where the past leaders, whom we wrongly believe to be less enlightened, score a point over their present counterparts. For a detailed account on the subject see Gurmit Singh, *Failure of the Akali Leadership*, Usha Institute of Religious Studies, Sirsa, 1981.
24. Niranjan Singh, *Jiwan Vikas*, p. 76.
25. File 459-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
26. Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 94.
27. By this time Akali ideology had fully percolated to the Sikh masses, especially in rural areas, and pro-British moderate Sikh leadership replaced by non-cooperators and nationalists.
28. File 459/II/1922, Home-Political N.A.I.
29. *The Akali*, 2 November 1922.
30. Letter No. 23, 11 October 1922, from Viscount Peel, Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, to Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India, *Reading Papers*, Mss Eur E 238, Vol. IV.
31. Telegram dated 18 October 1922 from the Secretary of State to Lord Reading quoted in File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
32. D.O. letter dated 31 October 1922, from H.D. Craik to S.P. O'Donnel, File No. 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
33. Secret Notes on the 'Present Akali Situation' in the *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/6-A, India Office Library, London; File 82 & KW/1925, Home-Political, N.A.I.
34. Panjab Government's Press Communique dated 15 October 1923, quoted in the P.L.C. *Proceedings*, Vol. VII, pp. 276-7 (October 1923).
35. Order No. 23772 (Home Department), Judicial, 12 October 1923 issued under the signature of C.A.H. Townsend, Officiating Chief Secretary to Government, Panjab. Quoted in File No. 28 of Nabha Records (Chief Minister's Office) at the Panjab State Archives Patiala.
36. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 16 October 1923; Teja Singh, *Aarsee*, pp. 66-7; Giani Nahar Singh, 'Akali Lehar', in the *Panjab*, p. 227.
37. Since the charges against these leaders could not be established so easily, the case dragged on till the passage of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill in July, 1925. It is interesting that those who were arrested and were being tried on such serious charges as the 'Treason against the King-Emperor' were released simply on making a written or verbal statement of working the Bill passed in 1925. *Master Tara Singh: Jiwan Sangrash te Udes*, pp. 82-3.
38. *The Akali*, 7 November 1923.
39. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 9 January 1924.
40. The S.G.P.C. Communique No. 588 in File No. 1/IV/1924, Home-Political, N.A.I. In a confidential letter the Panjab Government advised these officials to put off their shoes before entering the Akal Takhat. But this could be dispensed with in case of an encounter with the Akalis. File No. 1/IV/1924, Home-Political,



- N.A.I. According to Sir George Dunnett, his father, J.M. Dunnett, advised the concerned officials not to enter the Golden Temple premises with shoes on. (Author's interview with Sir George Dunnett, London.)
41. *Bhai Jodh Singh Abhinandan Granth*, Vol. I, pp. 52-3.
  42. S.G.P.C. Communique, No. 588, File No. 1/IV/1924, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  43. *Bhai Jodh Singh Abhinandan Granth*, Vol. I, pp. 52-3.
  44. S.G.P.C. Communique No. 593, quoted in File 1/IV/1924, Home-Political, N.A.I.; Jathedar Udharn Singh's telegram to the Viceroy quoted in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, 11 January 1924.
  45. *Bhai Jodh Singh Abhinandan Granth*, Vol. I, pp. 52-3.
  46. File 1/IV/1924, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  47. *The Akail*, 1 November 1923.
  48. *Ibid.*
  49. The book is now available for consultation in the Proscribed Indian Books collection of the British Museum, London, where I consulted it during 1974-75.
  50. By a Notification dated 13 September 1926, the Panjab Government withdrew its earlier order dated 12 October 1923, declaring S.G.P.C. and allied organisations as unlawful associations'. By another Notification dated 17 January 1927, the Government recognised the newly formed S.G.P.C.
  51. Address in the Council, 9 July 1925, *Proceedings*, Vol. IX-A.
  52. Quoted in Dr. Ganda Singh's 'Introduction' to the *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, p. xxii.
  53. Address in the Council, 9 July 1925. See note 51 above.
  54. *Ibid.*
  55. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 18 July 1925.
  56. Ganda Singh, (Ed.), *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*.
  57. *Ibid.*
  58. Proceedings of the General Committee meeting quoted in File No. 120/VIII, Home-Political, N.A.I.
  59. *Ibid.*
  60. For a detailed account of the later Sikh Politics see Mohinder Singh, "The Congress and Nationalist Sikh Politics (1920-1937)" in Ravinder Kumar (Ed.), *A Centenary History of the Indian National Congress*, Vikas Publishing Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1985, pp. 353-407. For biographical account of Baba Kharak Singh see Prem Singh Sodhbans (Ed.), *Baba Kharak Singh Abhinandan Granth*, New Delhi, 1954. While there is no standard biography of Master Tara Singh details of his involvement in the freedom movement and his role in later Akali politics are available in such works as Jaswant Singh (Ed.), *Master Tara Singh, Jiwan Sangarash te Udes*, Niranjan Singh: *Jiwan Yatra* Master Tara Singh and Baldev Raj Nayar, *Minority Politics in Panjab*.



## Chapter 6

1. Quoted in Ganda Singh (Ed.), *Bhai Jodh Singh Abhinandan Granth* (Punjabi), Vol. I, p. 45. *Akali Morche-te-Jhabbar* mentions the date as 24th January, 1921 (p. 95). Other accounts agree with the first date, i.e. December 14, 1920.
2. For a detailed account of the Akali Struggle see Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement*, Macmillan, 1978; Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, Navyug Publishers, Delhi, 1970.  
For a detailed study of the Punjabi Suba agitation see Baldev Nayar, *Minority Politics in the Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966; Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*. On recent developments in Akali politics, rise of Sant Jarnail Singh, Operation Blue Star and tragic events that followed, a large body of populist literature has come up. Some of the more dependable works are M.J. Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*; Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* and Amrik Singh (Ed.), *Punjab in Indian Politics: Issues and Trends*.
3. A detailed account of the S.G.P.C is given in the preceding chapter.
4. A nationalist Sikh, Sardul Singh Caveeshar was quite instrumental in bringing the Akali and Congress leadership close during the Akali movement and in promoting the Central Sikh League.
5. For a detailed account see Ganda Singh (Ed.), *Akali Morche-te-Jhabbar* (Punjabi).
6. For a detailed account of the tragedy see pp. 27-41 of the *Akali Movement*.
7. *Akali Morche-te-Jhabbar*, pp. 88-89.
8. General Staff's Note on 'The Military Aspect of the Present Situation in the Panjab', File No. 459-II/1922, Home-Political, National Archives of India.
9. Confidential Memorandum, 459-II/1922, Home-Political N.A.I.
10. For a detailed account see Sukhmani Bal's M. Phil Dissertation on the subject submitted to the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
11. See for detail, the *Akali Movement* pp. 91-92.
12. For a detailed account of the Akali agitation see pp. 43-49 of the above quoted work.

## Chapter 7

1. Sunder Singh Makhsuspuri, *Babbar Akali Lehar*, p. 88.
2. C.I.D. Report in File 268/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
3. Judgment by P.J. Rust in the *Akali Conspiracy Case*, quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 6 June 1922.
4. 'History of the Babbar Akali Movement' in File. 134/II/1923, Home-Political, N.A.I.



5. *Babbar Akali Case*, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 10 June 1923.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Babbar leaflet reproduced in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 5 October 1923.
8. *Ibid.*, 6 June 1922.
9. *Ibid.*, 30 August 1923.
10. *Ibid.*, 5 October 1923.
11. *Ibid.*
12. The word 'reform' (Sudhar in Panjabi) was the Babbar code for 'murder'.
13. Sunder Singh, op. cit., pp. 70-1.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Report in File 134-II/1923.
18. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 10 June 1923.
19. Sunder Singh, op. cit., pp. 98-9.
20. C.F. Isemonger's Evidence in the *Babbar Akali Case*, quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 31 October 1923.
21. File 134-II/1923, Home-Political, N.A.I.
22. Sunder Singh, op. cit., pp. 101-2.
23. See for details of the addresses presented by these associations to Malcolm Hailey, the Governor of the Panjab, G.R. Sethi's *Sikh Struggle for Gurdwara Reform* and the *Private Papers of Malcolm Hailey in the India Office Library*, London, Nos. Mss Eur E 220/41 to 45.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Panjab Government Communique dated 24 April 1923, File 134-II/1923. This account is confirmed by Sunder Singh's eyewitness account, *Babbar Akali Lehar*.
26. Babbar Declaration No. 1, issued under the signatures of Karam Singh Editor, Dhanna Singh and Udai Singh, Sunder Singh, op. cit., p. 118.
27. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 24 July 1923.
28. File 234-II/1923, Home-Political, N.A.I.
29. 'Notes on measures against the Babbar Akali Movement' in File 134-II/1923, Home-Political, N.A.I.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Babbar Akali Case*, quoted in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 9 August 1923.
32. File 134-II/1923, Home-Political, N.A.I.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Babbar leaflet quoted in above file.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*



39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Sunder Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
44. File 134-II/1923.
45. Sunder Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-30.
46. For details see 'My Friend the Revolutionary', *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 487-9.
47. Satya Rai, *Evolution of Heroic Traditions in Punjab in the Modern Times*, Punjabi University, Patiala.

## Chapter 8

1. For details see 'Notes on the Present Akali Situation with Suggestion for Future Policy' in *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/7-A, I.O.L. London; File 179-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
2. File 179-II/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. 'Resolutions of the Sikh League' (printed) British Museum Library, London.
6. *Ibid.*
7. P.L.C. *Proceedings*, March 1921.
8. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 7 April 1921.
9. File 944/1921, Home-Political, N.A.I.
10. Statement of Mian Fazl-i-Husain in the P.L.C., 11 August 1922.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Statement of Sir John Maynard in the P.L.C., 31 July 1922.
13. P.L.C. *Proceedings*, November 1922.
14. *Ibid.*
15. 'A Brief Statement of Panjab Government's Policy with Regard to Gurdwara Question', File 914/1922, Home-Political, N.A.I.
16. See for details Chapter 4 of this book.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Commenting about his relations with the Sikhs in one of his letters to Malcolm Hailey, he wrote, 'As I told a large gathering of Sikh soldiers a short time ago, I was proud to count them among my best friends in the world. Some of their community-men in whose custody, I would willingly leave my wife and children knowing that they would guard them with their lives'. Letter dated 16 January 1924, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/5-D.I.O.L.
19. Panjab Government Communique on the failure of the Birdwood negotiations, issued from Simla on 3 June 1924, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 5 June 1924.
20. Sir William Birdwood, *The Khaki and Gown*, Ward Lock and Co., London, 1941, p. 372.



21. Letter dated Lahore, 1 March 1924, from Sir Edward Maclagan, to Sir Malcolm Hailey, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/6-A, I.O.L.
22. *Ibid.*, Letter dated 3 March 1924 from Hailey to Maclagan.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Communique dated 13 June 1924, issued by the Secretary of the Akali Sahayak Bureau, Amritsar, *The Akali*, 16 June 1924.
25. Letter dated Simla 2 July 1924, from Hailey to Sir Valentine, London, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/6-A, I.O.L., London.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Letter dated 30 August 1924, from Hailey to Sir Alexander Muddiman, Home Member of Council, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/6-A, I O L , London.
28. Letter dated 22 January 1925 to Malcolm Hailey to Lord Reading, *Reading Papers*, Mss Eur E 220-7-A.
29. Letter dated 29 September 1924 from Hailey to Percival, London, *Hailey Papers*.
30. Letter dated 28 November 1924 from Hailey, to Sir Alexander Muddiman, Home Member of the Council, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/6-C, I.O.L., London.
31. Letter dated 30 August 1924 from Hailey to Sir Alexander Muddiman, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/6-B, I.O.L., London.
32. Quoted in Hailey's letter dated 29 October 1924 to Alexander Muddiman, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/6-C, I.O.L., London.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Letter dated 23 March 1925 from Hailey to Hon'ble Sir Narasimha Sarma, Law Member of the Council, *Hailey Papers*, Mss Eur E 220/7-A.
35. P.L.C. Proceedings, May 1925, VIII-A, p. 1105.
36. Note for His Excellency and Lord Reading's assent on it. File 120-VIII/1925.
37. Notification No. 4288-S Home-General, dated 12 October 1925, issued by the Panjab Government. File No. 50-xxxiii/1925, Home-Political, N.A.I.
38. 'Akali Lehar', *Panjab*, Vol. II, p. 213, File No. 50-xxxiii/1925, Home-Political, N.A.I.
39. Panjab Government's Notification dated 13 September 1927

## Chapter 9

1. For details see Mohinder Singh, op cit , pp. 137-8.
2. Report of the Cocanada session of the Congress quoted in the *Tribune*, 1 January 1924.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Since published in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol I, pp. 369-86.
5. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, 4 December 1921.
6. From the AICC Files (1919-24) at the N.M.M.L.



7. *Akali te Pardesi*, 25 December 1923.
8. The Central Sikh League was formed by the nationalist Sikhs in 1919 to fight for Sikh rights in the growing struggle for constitutional concessions. For a detailed account of the Central Sikh League see Sukhmani Bal, *Politics of the Central Sikh League*, 1919-29, M. Phil. Dissertation, Centre for Historical Studies; J.N.U., 1982.
9. Sukhmani Bal, cited above, pp. 193-5.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
11. A.M. and S.G. Zaidi, *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. IX, p. 261.
12. Kailash Gulati, *Akalis Past and Present*, pp. 32-33.
13. *The Tribune*, 29 February 1928.
14. Master Tara Singh's presidential address at the Central Sikh League meeting, quoted in *The Tribune*, 16 October 1929.
15. *Ibid.*
16. A.M. and S.G. Zaidi, *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. IX, pp. 670-1.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 672.
18. Prem Singh Sodhbans (ed.), *Baba Kharak Singh Abhinandan Granth*, p. 176.
19. *The Tribune*, 4 January 1930.
20. Kailash Gulati, *The Akalis Past and Present*, p. 55.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Quoted in K.L. Tuteja, *Sikh Politics*, p. 150.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Letter dated 10 May 1930 from de Mountmorency, Governor of Punjab, to Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, Halifax papers, N.M.M.L.
25. *The Tribune*, 20 November 1936.
26. *Ibid.*, 29 November 1938
27. *Ibid.*

## Chapter 10

1. For a detailed account see Kapur Singh's booklet, *The Stupid Sikhs*.
2. See Gurmit Singh, *Failures of the Akali Leadership*, Usha Institute of Religious Studies, Sirsa, 1981.
3. Harjinder Singh Dilgir, *Shiromani Akali Dal* (Punjabi), Jullundur, 1978.
4. Gurmit Singh quoted above, p. 159.
5. V.P. Menon (Ed.), *Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, p. 7.
6. On the basis of personal discussion with Dr. J S. Neki.
7. At the time of the creation of Punjabi Suba in November, 1966 the Sikh population was nearly 55% while according to latest census this has gone up to 63%.



8. For a critical account see Baldev Raj Nayar, *Minority Politics in the Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1966. Ajit Singh Sarhadi's pro-Akali account is available in *Punjabi Suba the Story of the Struggle*, U.C. Kapur and Sons, Delhi, 1970. For a comparative study of agitations over language issue in Bihar, U.P. and Panjab see Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1974.
9. Quoted in Sarhadi, pp. 147-48.
10. Quoted in Paul Brass, p. 320.
11. Baldev Raj Nayar, *Minority Politics in Punjab*, pp. 218-19.
12. While there is no standard biography on Master Tara Singh details of his role in various movements are available in such works as Jaswant Singh (Ed.), *Master Tara Singh: Jiwan. Sanghaisht te Udesht* (Punjabi), Niranjan Singh, *Jiwan Yatra Master Tara Singh* (Punjabi) and his autobiography in Punjabi, *Meri Yaad*.
13. *The Tribune*, October 30, 1948.
14. Zail Singh started his career as a village preacher but later joined the freedom struggle as an activist of the Parja Mandal Movement in the princely Sikh state of Faridkot. After independence he became a minister in the Panjab cabinet and later rose to the position of the Chief Minister of Panjab in March, 1942. In January, 1950 he was inducted in the Central Cabinet as the Home Minister and later elevated to the highest office of the President of India in July, 1952, first Sikh to have attained this exalted position in free India.
15. Amongst the best works on the subject is M J. Akbar's *India the Siege Within*, Penguin, 1955.
16. Quoted in *Amritsar : Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*, London, 1955, p. 60.
17. *The Hindustan Times*, December 6, 1956.
18. During the post-Operation Blue Star period number of journalists have tried to cash in on the myth of Bhindranwale which has resulted in large body of populist literature on the subject and cannot be described as serious or dependable biography of the late Sant. However, on various issues leading to Operation Blue Star and the Consequences which followed the best edited work is Amrik Singh's *Punjab in Indian Politics; Issues and Trends*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1959.



## CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

- 12 October 1920 Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat come under the Akali control.
- 15 November 1920 General assembly of the Sikhs to elect the S.G.P.C.
- 16 November 1920 The S.G.P.C. comes into existence.
- 19 November 1920 Gurdwara Panja Sahib (Hasan Abdal) comes under Akali control.
- 14 December 1920 Shiromani Akali Dal established.
- 20 January 1921 Durbar Sahib Tarn Taran comes under Akali control.
- 20 February 1921 Bhai Lachhman Singh's Jatha reaches Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana. Tragedy of Nankana.
- 21 February 1921 Janam Asthan and other Gurdwaras at Nankana come under Panthic control.
- 1 March 1921 Maulana Shaukat Ali and other nationalist leaders attend the Shahidi Diwan at Nankana.
- 3 March 1921 Mahatma Gandhi addresses a Shahidi Diwan at Nankana and calls upon the Sikhs to adopt non-cooperation.
- 21 March 1921 Babbar Akali Movement begins.
- 5 April 1921 First Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill introduced in the Panjab Legislative Council.
- 11 May 1921 The Akali leadership passes a formal resolution in favour of non-cooperation.
- 29 October 1921 Keys of the Toshakhana of Golden Temple Amritsar taken away by the Government official.



- 11 November 1921 Protest meetings against the official action in taking over the keys.
- 26 November 1921 Arrests of the Akali leaders over the issue of the Keys.
- 17 January 1922 Government unconditionally releases the Akali leaders and others arrested in connection with the Keys agitation.
- 18 January 1922 A Gazetted Officer delivers the Keys to Baba Kharak Singh at a specially arranged Diwan at Akal Takhat, Amritsar.
- 9 August 1922 Arrest of the Akalis at Guru-ka-Bagh.
- 22 August 1922 Guru-ka-Bagh morcha begins.
- 10 September 1922 Hakim Ajmal Khan, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and other national leaders address the Akali Diwan at Amritsar.
- 12 September 1922 Rev. C.F. Andrews visits Guru-ka-Bagh.
- 13 September 1922 Panjab Governor, Sir Edward Maclagan, and other officials visit Guru-ka-Bagh.
- 7 November 1922 Second Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill introduced in the Panjab Legislative Council.
- 25 November 1922 Military pensioners' *Jatha* arrested at Guru-ka-Bagh.
- 23 April 1923 Unconditional release of the Akalis arrested in connection with the Guru-ka-Bagh morcha.
- 9 July 1923 Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha forced to abdicate his throne.
- 4 August 1923 S.G.P.C. general body decides to take up the Nabha issue.
- 27 August 1923 Arrest of the Akalis at Jaito.
- 25 September 1923 Jawaharlal Nehru, A.T. Gidwani and K. Santhanam arrested at Nabha.
- 29 September 1923 Jaito morcha begins.
- 12 October 1923 Panjab Government passes an order declaring the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the Shiromani Akali Dal



- and the various Jathas affiliated to them as 'unlawful associations.'
- 31 December 1923 Indian National Congress passes formal resolution supporting the Akali agitation at Nabha at its annual session at Co-canada.
- 21 February 1924 Firing at the Shahidi Jatha at Jaito.
- 11 April 1924 Birdwood Committee announced by the Government.
- 2 June 1924 Birdwood Committee announces its failure.
- 28 February 1925 Six Babbar Akalis sentenced to death.
- 7 July 1926 Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill passed by the Panjab Legislative Council.
- 28 July 1925 The Gurdwara Bill gets the approval of the Governor-General.
- 6 August 1925 Completion of 101 Akhand Paths at Jaito and termination of the Akali Movement. Sardar Teja Singh Samundri dies in jail.
- 1 November 1925 The Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Act enforced.



## GLOSSARY OF PUNJABI WORDS

<i>Akali</i>	Immortal, Deathless
<i>Ardas</i>	The Sikh prayer
<i>Buddha Dal</i>	Band of the old Nihangs
<i>Chela</i>	Disciple, follower
<i>Chaudhri</i>	Chief, Headman
<i>Dera</i>	Abode of a group or sect
<i>Dharamsal</i>	An earlier name used for Gurdwara
<i>Diwan</i>	Congregation, religious-gathering
<i>Durbar</i>	Seat of authority
<i>Feringhee</i>	Foreigner (here used for Englishmen)
<i>Gaddi</i>	Hereditary seat of authority or priesthood
<i>Gurdwara</i>	The Sikh temple also called Dharamsal
<i>Gurmatta</i>	A decision taken by Sikh congregations
<i>Granth</i>	The holy book of the Sikhs
<i>Granthi</i>	The Sikh priest
<i>Hukamnamah</i>	Directive from a Guru or the holy seats of Sikh authority
<i>Jagir</i>	Land-grant
<i>Jatha</i>	Band of devotees
<i>Jathedar</i>	Leader or commander of the Jatha
<i>Jholi Chuk</i>	Toady, sycophant (here used for supporters of British imperialism)
<i>Kar Sewa</i>	Cleansing of the holy tank
<i>Kirtan</i>	Singing of the sacred hymns
<i>Krah Prasad</i>	The sacred sweetened food (pudding)
<i>Langar</i>	Free community kitchen
<i>Mahant</i>	A hereditary head of a religious shrine or trust
<i>Morcha</i>	Literally entrenchment. In the present context it means direct confrontation with the Mahants/British Government



<i>Panth</i>	The Sikh community as a whole
<i>Sarbrah</i>	The manager or custodian of the <i>Gurdwara</i>
<i>Saropa</i>	Robe of honour
<i>Shahid</i>	Martyr



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.M.	British Museum (Oriental Collection), London
B. (N) L.	British (Newspaper) Library. Colindale, London
B.S.T.L.	Bhai Takhat Singh Library, Ferozepur
C.K.D.	Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar
C.L.A.	Central Legislative Assembly
C. and M.G.	<i>The Civil and Military Gazette</i> (Lahore)
C.P.L.	The Central Public Library, Patiala
C.S.L.	The Central Sikh League
F.P.	Foreign-Political files of the Government of India
H.P.	Home-Political files of the Government of India
I.L.R.	Indian Law Reports
I.N.C.	Indian National Congress
I.O.L.	India Office Library, London
K.C.I.E.	Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire
K.C.L.	Khalsa College (Sikh History Research Department) Library, Amritsar
L.A.D.	Legislative Assembly Debates
M.L.C.	Member of the Legislative Council (Panjab)
M.S.V.	Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid Collection in the Punjabi University Library, Patiala
N.A.I.	National Archives of India, New Delhi
N.M.M.L.	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi
P.H.C.Pr.	Panjab History Conference Proceedings
P.L.C.Pr.	Panjab Legislative Council Proceedings



- P.P.A. Panjab Press Abstracts (from the Native Press Abstracts)
- P.S.A. Panjab State Archives, Patiala
- Q.R. *The Quarterly Registers* [M.N. Mitra (ed.)]
- S.A.D. The Shiromani Akali Dal
- S.E.C. Sikh Educational Conference
- S.G.P.C. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee
- S.O.A.S. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London



## APPENDIX I

### **Copy of Letter from C.M, King, Commissioner, Lahore Division, to Baba Kartar Singh Bedi\***

With reference to our conversation of 18 December about the claim of Mahants to peaceful possession of shrines in which they hold established rights I write to say that any person who attempts to eject forcibly any Mahant or other person holding rights in a shrine is liable to punishment under the criminal law. The Mahant may, if he has reasonable cause to suppose that he will be forcibly removed from his shrine, apply to the District Magistrate for protection provided he pays the cost for such protection. He may also, if he wishes, complain under Section 107, Criminal Procedure Code, and ask for security to be taken from persons likely to use force to him. If in spite of precautions he is ejected from his shrine he can sue for recovery of his rights and also bring criminal proceedings.

\*Undated letter written on or about 18 December 1920, quoted in File No. 179/II/1922, Home-Poll, National Archives of India, New Delhi, also published in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, 1 March 1921.



## APPENDIX II

### Order\*

The large bands of Akalis collected at Guru-ka-Bagh, Tehsil Ajnala, are illegal assemblies. They are being supported by provisions sent to Guru-ka-Bagh from surrounding villages and from Amritsar city in carts and *ekkas*. Subscriptions are being collected in Amritsar city and provisions are being purchased and sent out to Guru-ka-Bagh. The consigners and carriers of such supplies are engaged in the commission of a cognizable offence under Section 143/109, Indian Penal Code, *i.e.*, the abetment of an illegal assembly. The commission of this offence must be prevented under Section 149, Criminal Procedure Code. I, therefore, direct the police officers of the pickets at the Ranewala and the Chinnawala bridges on the Lahore branch of the Upper Bari Doab Canal to prevent the transmission of such supplies to the illegal assemblies at Guru-ka-Bagh. Carts, other conveyances and animals carrying such supplies as appear to be intended for the illegal assemblies should be stopped and attendants interrogated. If there is good reason to believe that the supplies are intended for these assemblies the carriers should be directed to return them whence they came. If carriers refuse to do so, the supplies should be sent to me in Amritsar for orders.

Sd/- J.M. Dunett,  
District Magistrate

\*Quoted in the *Proceedings* of the Panjab Legislative Council, Vol IV, 1922, pp. 470-1.



## APPENDIX III

### Home Department (Judicial)

12 October 1923

No. 23772, Whereas the Governor of Panjab in Council is of opinion that the Association known as the 'Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee' and all Jathas organised by or affiliated to this body interfere with the maintenance of law and order, and that they jointly and severally constitute a danger to the public peace;

Now, therefore, the Governor of the Panjab in Council, by virtue of the powers conferred upon him by Section 16 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, as ammended by the Devolution Act, 1920, is pleased hereby to declare the said Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and the said Jathas to be unlawful associations.

C.A.H. Townsend,  
Officiating Chief Secretary  
to the Government, Panjab

Order No. 23773 similarly declared the 'Akali Dal' or 'Shiromani Akali Dal' as unlawful associations.

Copied from File No. 28, Nabha State Records (Chief Minister's Office) at the Panjab State Archives, Patiala.



## APPENDIX IV

### **Guru-ka-Bagh: An Eyewitness Account** by C.F. Andrews\*

#### I

In this communication to the Press, I shall confine myself to what I have seen with my own eyes since my arrival at Amritsar on the morning of 12 September 1922.

At 1 p.m. on that day I started for Guru-ka-Bagh and after leaving the main road proceeded along the bank of a canal. There were three *tongas* in all. When we had gone some distance along to bank of the canal, we saw two Sikhs in black turbans on the opposite bank waving their hands to us and pointing to the sky, where a great bird was circling in its flight towards Amritsar. Immediately all those who were in the tongas got down and eagerly pointed out the bird to me and told me that every day, as soon as the beating at Guru-ka-Bagh began, the golden hawk rose from the Guru's garden and took its flight to Amritsar to tell those who were serving at the Golden Temple what was taking place. They asked me if I had seen the bird, and I answered that I had seen in the distance the great bird which they had pointed out but I could not say whether it was a golden hawk or not. They said to me, 'That was the bird. It was the golden hawk. It has gone to tell at the Darbar Sahib about the sufferings of the people.' There was a light in their faces as they spoke to me with betokened joy. I was especially struck by the look of devotion in the face of a Sikh lady of middle age who accompanied us. I can

\*Culled from *The Tribune*, 19-20 September, 1920.



only describe it by saying that she looked, in her quiet devotion, like a picture of the 'Madonna'. The whole scene, the intense faith of my companions, the look of reverence in their faces, the solemn awe mingled with joy, moved me very deeply. It was the first event which really gave me the religious atmosphere of all that I was afterwards to experience in the later scenes. It put me in touch with the Akali reform movement in its spiritual aspects as perhaps nothing else could have done.

After leaving the bank of the canal we had to pass across open ground for a long distance which was covered with water in certain places. Our progress was naturally slow in the tongas. We met on the route a band of hundred Akalis in black turbans, who had marched that morning from Amritsar after having taken the vow at the Golden Temple that they would not commit one single act of violence, either by word or deed. I was to see, later on, how faithfully they kept that vow. On subsequent days I had opportunities of witnessing the scene at the Golden Temple itself as they came out with religious joy written on their faces and a tiny wreath of white flower placed on their black turbans which dedicated them to the sacrifice. I was able to see also, in the city, the crowds of spectators, Hindus, Musalmans, and those of every religion, welcoming and encouraging them, as they marched solemnly and joyfully forward calling upon the name of God as their protector and saviour. There, in the city, they were at the very beginning of their pilgrimage. Mile after mile of mud-stained, water-logged road lay before them. When I saw them, on this first day of my visit, as they drew near to the end of their march, they were bespattered with mud and dirt and perspiration was streaming from them, and their garlands of white flowers were stiff encircling their black turbans, but they were still uttering with triumphant voices their prayer to God for protection, and the light of religion was still bright upon their faces. There were some who were young lads among them, and a very few old men with grey beards who had insisted on being taken and would not be denied, but the great majority were of military age and it was easy to guess that out of these stalwart bearded men there had been many who had served in the army. I had an opportunity later of getting



accurate statistics and it would appear that at least one in three of the Sikhs in these Akali Jathas (as they are called) had been a soldier and had served during the Great War.

We got down from the tongas and went along with them for some distance. I was dressed in my English dress, with a sun helmet on my head, but even before they knew my name they returned my greeting without the slightest trace of bitterness in their faces. There was a halt to drink water and they got to know who I was and came forward. Then one who was serving water with a brass vessel came to me and offered the water to me also to drink. I put my hand forward to receive it, but he said to me, 'Please take the vessel itself' and I took it in my hands and drank from it. The act had a strongly religious aspect to me. It was as if I was sharing in a sacrament of consecration before the suffering was to begin.

At any place where water could be received along the road there were villagers, both men and women, who waited eagerly each day to fulfil this small act of service by giving water to the Akali Jathas. Again, I noticed the extraordinary devotion of the women. Their faces were full of motherly tenderness towards those who were going forward, in the name of their religion, to receive suffering without retaliation.

After very great difficulty and many halts at impassable places we reached Guru-ka-Bagh at last. The first sight that met our gaze was that of eight motor lorries, such as usually carry passengers for hire which were now being used as a substitute for ambulance wagons. When I looked at them, I could picture vividly the acute suffering to those who would be carried in them for more than fourteen miles to the base hospital in the city. Here and there the motors would almost certainly get stuck in the deep mud. The jolting in other places would be difficult to bear even for a man who was quite well. What must it have been to men who were suffering from many contusions and wounds?

There was one act of humanity which might at once have been thought of on the part of the officials, but no one among them seemed to have noticed it or suggested it. The public road along the canal was almost worse, from the point of view of jolting, than the open track beyond. But on the other side



of the canal was a private road, kept for officials, along which the motor lorries with the wounded persons might have passed smoothly and quickly. It would have been an inexpressible relief to them on that terrible journey back from Guru-ka-Bagh, if the lorries had been allowed to use it. But the subordinate Government officials who were approached time after time by the doctors and attendants refused altogether to allow them. I am quite certain that if the higher officials had been approached they would not have refused. But one of the greatest hardships in India at the present time is the tension which exists on both sides, the open gulf which grows day by day wider and wider, the almost complete distrust with which Indians have learnt, by bitter experience, to regard the official world.

## II

When I reached the Gurdwara itself, I was struck at once by the absence of excitement such as I had expected to find among so great a crowd of people. Close to the entrance there was a reader of the Scriptures, who was holding a very large congregation of worshippers silent as they were seated on the ground before him. In another quarter there were attendants who were preparing the simple evening meal for the Gurdwara guests by grinding the flour between two large stones. There was no sign that the actual beating had just begun and that the sufferers had already endured the shower of blows. But when I asked one of the passers-by, he told me that the beating was now taking place. On hearing this news I at once went forward. There were some hundreds present seated on an open piece of ground watching what was going on in front, their faces strained with agony. I watched their faces first of all, before I turned to the corner of a building and reached a spot where I could see the beating itself. There was not a cry raised from the spectators but the lips of very many of them were moving in prayer. It was clear that they had been taught to repeat the name of God and to call on God for deliverance. I can only describe the silence and the worship and the pain upon the faces of these people, who were seated in prayer, as reminding me of the shadow of the Cross. What



was happening to them was truly, in some dim way, a crucifixion. The Akalis were undergoing their baptism of fire, and they cried to God for help out of the depth of their agony of spirit.

Up till now I had not seen the suffering itself except as it was reflected in the faces of the spectators. But when I passed beyond a projecting wall and stood face to face with the ultimate moral contest I could understand the strained looks and the lips that silently prayed. It was a sight which I never wish to see again, a sight incredible to an Englishman. There were four Akali Sikhs with black turbans facing a band of about a dozen policemen, including two English officers. They had walked slowly upto the line of the police just before I had arrived and they were standing silently in front of them at about a yard's distance. They were perfectly still and did not move further forward. Their hands were placed together in prayer and it was clear that they were praying. Then, without the slightest provocation on their part, an Englishman lunged forward the head of his lathi which was bound with brass. He lunged it forward in such a way that his fist which held the staff struck the Akali Sikh, who was praying, just at the collar bone with great force. It looked the most cowardly blow as I saw it struck and I had the greatest difficulty in keeping myself under control. But beforehand I had determined that I must, on no account, interfere by word or deed, but simply watch; for the vow, which had been taken by the sufferers, must be sacred to me also. Therefore passive silence on my part was imperative, but it is difficult to describe to those who have not seen the sight with their own eyes how difficult such a passive attitude was.

The blow which I saw was sufficient to fell the Akali Sikh and send him to the ground. He rolled over, and slowly got up once more, and faced the same punishment over again. Time after time one of the four who had gone forward was laid prostrate by repeated blows, now from the English officer and now from the police who were under his control. The others were knocked out more quickly. On this and on subsequent occasions the police committed certain acts which were brutal in the extreme. I saw with my own eyes one of these police kick in the stomach a Sikh who stood helplessly before him. It



was a blow so foul that I could hardly restrain myself from crying out loud and rushing forward. But later on I was to see another act which was, if anything, even fouler still. For when one of the Akali Sikhs had been hurled to the ground and was lying prostrate, a police sepoy stamped with his foot upon him, using his full weight; the foot struck the prostrate man between the neck and the shoulder. A third blow, almost equally foul, was struck at an Akali when he was standing at the side of his fallen companion. This blow hurled him across the body of the fallen man who was unconscious at the very time when he was being taken up by two ambulance workers. The intention of such a blow was so brutally insolent, that I watched for the Englishman in command, in this case as also in other cases, to rebuke the police sepoy who did the deed, but as far as I could see he did nothing to check or to rebuke his men. I told all these things that I had seen to the Governor and every officer whom I met the next day.

The brutality and inhumanity of the whole scene was indescribably increased by the fact that the men who were hit were praying to God and had already taken a vow that they would remain silent and peaceful in word and deed. The Akali Sikhs who had taken this vow, both at the Golden Temple before starting and also at the shrine of Guru-ka-Bagh, were as I have already stated, largely from the army. They had served in many campaigns in Flanders, in France, in Mesopotamia and in East Africa. Some of them at the risk of their own safety may have saved the lives of Englishmen who had been wounded. Now they were felled to the ground at the hand of English officials serving in the same Government which they themselves had served. They were obliged to bear the brunt of blows, each one of which was an insult and humiliation, but each blow was turned into a triumph by the spirit with which it was endured.

It was a strangely new experience to these men, to receive blows dealt against them with such of the force as to fell them to the ground, and yet never to utter a word or strike a blow in return. The vow they had made to God was kept to the letter. I saw no act, no look, of defiance. It was a true martyrdom for them as they went forward, a true act of faith, a true deed of devotion to God. They remembered their Gurus



how they had suffered, and they rejoiced to add their own sufferings to the treasure of their wonderful faith. The on-lookers too, who were Sikhs, were praying with them and praying for them, and the inspiration of their noble religion, with its joy in suffering innocently borne, could alone keep them from rushing forward to retaliate for the wrong which they felt was being done.

There has been something far greater in this event than a mere dispute about land and property. It has gone far beyond the technical questions of legal possession or distraint. A new heroism, learnt through suffering, has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world. This fact, in the ultimate issue, is independent of the mere legal question of trespass decided for or against the Akali Sikhs. They believe intensely that their right to cut wood in the garden of the Guru was an immemorial religious right, and this faith of theirs is surely to be counted for righteousness, whatever a defective and obsolete law may determine or fail to determine concerning legality.

One thing I have not mentioned which was significant of all that I have written concerning the spirit of the suffering endured. It was very rarely that I witnessed any Akali Sikh, who went forward to suffer, flinch from a blow when it was struck. Apart from the instinctive and involuntary reaction of the muscles that has the appearance of a slight shrinking back, there was nothing, so far as I can remember, that could be called a deliberate avoidance of the blow struck. The blows were received one by one without resistance and without a sign of fear.



## APPENDIX V

### **Draft Statement of Jawarharlal Nehru to be Read in Court at Nabha**

I do not desire to defend myself in this proceeding, which has been started against me, or in any other proceeding which the present administration of Nabha may take against me. I write this statement to inform the Court of the facts as I know them and to correct some incorrect statements that have been made. I further wish to make clear the object of my visit to Nabha.

I have had every courtesy from this Court and I have no grievance against it. Indeed there is little room for any grievance or complaint where the Court has merely acted as a post office to convey the orders of some one else who has kept in the background. When at Jaito I read in the order served on me that a certain Mr. J. Wilson Johnston purported to be the present 'Administrator of Nabha State'. I had never heard of this gentleman before. I have read in the papers that the administration of Nabha has been changed, the Maharaja made to retire and some other arrangement had been made. But I am not aware under what law this change in the Administration had been made and an 'Administrator' appointed. Nor do I know that any mention is made in the Criminal Procedure Code or Indian Penal Code of the 'Administrator' or of his right to issue orders under Section 144 Criminal Penal Code. Ever since my arrival at Jaito however I have been repeatedly confronted with the name or designation of present 'Administrator' of Nabha. To almost every question that I have asked the reply has been given that the 'Administrator' will decide. Even the most trivial matters which have been



provided for in the jail manual have been referred to him. Under-trial prisoners are supposed to possess certain rights—to consult their relatives and advisers, to write letters through the jail authorities, etc. I have been prevented from seeing or communicating with any person outside and have been informed that such is the order of the 'Administrator'. The Court informed me on one occasion that we would be allowed to write letters home if the jail rules so allowed but immediately after came the orders of the 'Administrator' that this would not be permitted. Even a request for a change of clothes had to be referred to the 'Administrator' and it took two full days before I was allowed to take out a change from my luggage. Yesterday morning I presented an application to the Court insisting on my right, as an under-trial prisoner, to interview my relatives and advisers and also to write letters. A second sitting of the court took place in the afternoon and I was informed that my application had been sent to the 'Administrator' who had passed certain orders on it. Thus on the admission of the Court, it is the 'Administrator' who takes upon himself the business of deciding on our applications, and the Court has merely the pleasant function of transmitting his orders to us. The whole trial becomes a farce if the Court is relegated to this position. We are not being tried in a Court of law but in a feeble parody of it with the 'Administrator' sitting in the background somewhere behind the *purdah*, issuing orders to his marionettes who have to carry out his bidding without thought or reason. Indeed the 'Administrator' is like Pooh-Bah of the Mikado, the Lord High Everything, and interferes in every matter, judicial or executive.

I am informed that my father was in Nabha yesterday. He had come all the way from Allahabad to see me and advise me but we have not been permitted to see each other. I merely point this out as an instance of the ways in which the Nabha State is administered at present.

My companions and I had read in the papers about strange doings in Nabha and Jaito. We decided to come here for a couple of days to see what was happening. We also wanted to see in what manner the Akali Sikhs were meeting the situation. We therefore proceeded to Muktsar and from there we went by road on horseback and bullock cart towards Jaito. On our way



we passed Akali Jathas. About two or three miles from Jaito we caught up with a Jatha and discarding our bullock cart and horse we decided to walk along in their wake. Thus we arrived at Jaito. When the Jatha was stopped at Jaito we stood by to see what was happening. We were asked by the police or military who we were and what our object was. We told them that we were obviously not Akalis or members of the Jatha. We had come along with them to note developments. We continued watching from the roadside. The statement of the Superintendent of Police of Jaito to the effect that we were forcibly kept back from proceeding further—*hath phaila ke roke gai*—is, like many other statements made by the worthy member of the police force in this and in another proceeding, a lie. There was no object in our trying to force our way. We had come to watch and we stood aside to see the Jatha and the police. Just then the Superintendent of Police came and showed me an order under Section 144 signed by Mr. Wilson Johnston as 'Administrator' of Nabha State. I accepted the service of this order and informed the Superintendent that I did not intend leaving Nabha territory. My companions and I then went to a small building nearby—I think it is called the *Dharamshala*—and sat down in the verandah as the sun was hot outside. A little later the Superintendent of Police returned with some others, one of whom we were told was the District Magistrate of the place. We were formally arrested under Section 188. My companions pointed out that no order had been served on them so far but this difficulty was got over by the District Magistrate pronouncing an oral order against them under Section 144 Criminal Penal Code. As my friends are dealing with their part of the case I need not say more about it. I may mention however that the statement of the Superintendent of Police of Jaito that my companions refused to sign the order under Section 144 is an untruth. They were never asked to sign. I am sure that they would have willingly signed if they had been asked to do so. These are the facts leading up to our arrest. I do not desire to take advantage of any technicalities but I wish to make it clear that the order under Section 144 was not a *bona fide* order. There was not the slightest danger of our visit resulting in a breach of public tranquillity and I make bold to say that the 'Administrator'



knew this. Indeed, our entry into Nabha territory, our stay there for some hours and eventually our arrest, did not as a matter of fact result in any disturbance of the public peace. The only peace that it probably disturbed was the peace of mind of the 'Administrator'. The issuing of this order under Section 144 is a prostitution of legal process. It was not meant to serve an object contemplated by the law but merely to prevent outsiders from entering Nabha State. The State has apparently become sacred territory where none may enter who is not prepared to bow down to the 'Administrator'.

The order refers to our membership of the All India Congress Committee and gives as a reason for the fear of a breach of peace the recent resolutions of the Congress Committee. I take it that the 'Administrator' is not well up in what is happening outside Nabha State and in his ignorance has referred to the resolutions of the Special Congress held at Delhi as resolutions of the 'Congress Committee'. I have thus been arrested in my capacity as a member of the All India Congress Committee. The 'Administrator's' references to the Congress and the Committee are unbecoming and insulting and as a humble member of that national body I cannot tolerate any such impertinence.

I have stated above that my object in visiting Nabha State was to find out the truth of various allegations made against the present administration. That object has been largely served and I have to thank the 'Administrator' and his underlings for the speedy discovery to the true state of affairs in Nabha. Our arrest soon after we entered Nabha territory on a peaceful mission of enquiry, our subsequent treatment, our seclusion from all outside contact, the refusal to permit us to see our advisers and relatives, the refusal to allow us to send any letters or other communications even as undertrial prisoners and lastly the farce of a trial which we are undergoing, are eloquent testimony of the present state of Nabha. I have no personal knowledge of the conditions prevailing in the State during Maharaja Ripudaman Singh's rule but I can say from personal knowledge that the present conditions are scandalous and shocking. No man who values his honour and refuses to bow down to the 'Administrator' is apparently safe. High officials of the old Nabha administration are at present in the



jail with us, their crime being apparently their loyalty to their old chief. They are not tried, nor is a charge brought against them. The old system of *lettres de cachet* evidently finds favour with the 'Administrator' of Nabha State. Others who have been tried are little better off. Their trials are farcical and monstrous sentences are awarded to them. Trials are practically conducted in camera and outsiders are seldom if ever admitted. Even in our case when there was some inducement to the authorities to observe the forms of law, people were seldom allowed to enter. They were stopped outside in spite of my drawing the attention of the Court repeatedly to this fact. To all our protests the answer is given: such is the way in Nabha State. It has not taken us long to discover the way in Nabha State under the present 'Administrator'.

We have also come across in jail respected members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee treated as ordinary felons although they have not even been sentenced yet. Many Akalis in the jail have been on hunger strike for some time.

I should also like to state here as an instance of Nabha justice certain proceedings taken against us yesterday. Late in the evening, after dusk and after we had already had two sittings of this court, we were taken to a room and made to sit there. There were others present there including our old acquaintance the Superintendent of Police of Jaito and the Court Inspector. With us was placed another prisoner in chains. Suddenly the Court Inspector started questioning the Superintendent of Police. I enquired what was happening and was told that a fresh proceeding had started against us. We were being charged under Section 145 I.P.C. for being members or leaders of an unlawful assembly. No notice or warrant or any kind of information had been given to us of this proceeding. I told the Court that this was the most extraordinary procedure I had heard of outside a stage and it was utterly opposed to all law and procedure. The proceedings however continued, the farce has gone through. The Superintendent of Police of Jaito excelled himself and drew upon his imagination to remarkable extent. He improved upon his old story as stated in this Court and gave utterance to more lies in a few minutes than I can remember. We were charged with refusal



to disperse after we had been ordered to do so. I was not aware till I came to Nabha under arrest that any Jatha had been declared to be an unlawful assembly. Nor was any one, in my hearing, asked to disperse. The Jatha was asked to go back and not to proceed further. They refused to turn back and sat down on the road. My companions and I were not asked to go away or disperse. I was shown the order under Section 144 which I refused to obey and then, as I have stated above, we went and sat in the varandah of the *Dharmshala*. There we were arrested. It is somewhat difficult for me to understand how persons under arrest can disperse.

Our co-accused in this proceeding was one Darbara Singh. He was stated by the imaginative Superintendent of Police to have been the leader of the Jatha and to have contumaciously refused to disperse his Jatha. This is an absolute lie and I can speak from personal knowledge of it. Darbara Singh was never with the Jatha. Every member of the Jatha wore a black turban. Darbara Singh had a saffron-coloured turban on and so could easily be recognised. Darbara Singh met my companions and me when we were riding quite separated from the Jatha some miles from Jaito. As we did not know the way he was good enough to guide us. When we started walking, Darbara Singh took my pony and marched with my luggage and with my luggage he went to Jaito station. He was nowhere near the Jatha when the police or the military stopped it, nor was he arrested there. He was probably arrested at the station where he happened to be with my luggage. The whole story of Darbara Singh as stated by the Jaito Superintendent of Police is a lie and is clearly an afterthought.

This is the justice of the present administration of Nabha. The Jatha which came to jail has, I believe, been released but Darbara Singh, a man who had nothing to do with it, has been run in for leading that Jatha. Darbara Singh has suffered for his country for many years. He has suffered internment in jail and has been shot at by British troops ever since he came back on the *Komagata Maru*. I am proud to be put in the same dock with him and trust that I shall exhibit the same courage as he has shown on numerous occasions.

Various proceedings are being taken against us in Nabha Courts. I have pointed out how utterly illegal and groundless



they are. My friend and co-accused Mr. Santhanam has dealt with the law and I do not desire to say anything more about it. We do not desire to take advantage of any technical or legal plea. I merely point them out to show how unscrupulous the proceedings are. It is my business to combat the British Government in India and all its works and I shall continue to do so till we have achieved success. The straight thing to do is to run me in for sedition and I shall gladly and joytully admit the charge. But the ways of the Nabha administration are not straight. They are crooked.

I rejoice that I am being tried for a cause which the Sikhs have made their own. I was in jail when the Guru-ka-Bagh struggle was gallantly fought and won by the Sikhs. I marvelled at the courage and sacrifice of the Akalis and wished that I could be given an opportunity of showing my deep admiration of them by some form of service. That opportunity has now been given to me and I earnestly hope that I shall prove worthy of their high tradition and fine courage. *Sat Sri Akal.\**

Central Jail  
Nabha

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU  
25 September 1923  
10-30 a.m.

\*This is a copy of the first hand-written draft statement in 'Papers relating to Nabha Trial' at the Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi (since published in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* edited by S. Gopal). Since the original draft contained a few paragraphs which were highly critical of the British Administrator of Nabha and the administrative and judicial machinery in the State and greatly appreciated the Akali Sikhs and their struggle, his father, who visited Nabha in connection with his court defence, 'replaced these paragraphs with a closely argued statement written with the cold pen of a lawyer'. It was the changed version which was actually read by Jawaharlal Nehru at the Nabha court on 28 September 1923. For lack of space it is not possible to append the revised version for which the reader is advised to see Ganda Singh (ed.), *Panjab Past and Present*, October 1970, pp. 425-31. Also see S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol: I, and Barun De, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and the Indian Freedom Struggle', published in the *Indian Historical Review*, January.



## APPENDIX VI

**Copy of letter dated 9 April 1924 from S. Zimand, Representative of the 'New York Times', to Mahatma Gandhi about the firing on the Shahidi Jatha at Jaito**

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

On the eve of my departure from India I want to tell you again how fortunate I consider myself to have had the opportunity of visiting your land. I want to use this opportunity of thanking through you, your innumerable friends and countrymen for their gracious hospitality, unfailing courtesy and generous help they have rendered to me during my whole stay in India.

At my interview with you at Juhu, Bombay, you asked me a few questions about the occurrences at Jaito on 21 February of this year. I feel that in my anxiety to find out your views on the different political and social problems, I monopolised the long time which you kindly gave me and neglected to give a coherent description of what actually occurred at Jaito. I shall therefore try to tell you now, as truthfully as I know, about the incident at Jaito. I am especially anxious to send you my version of the incident because my name has repeatedly been mentioned in this connection by the Press.

On the morning of 20 February I arrived in Amritsar. According to my previous arrangements I was to leave on the morning of the next day for Peshawar. A few hours after my arrival I decided to proceed to Jaito. I started from Amritsar by motor with Mr. Gidwani, Dr. Kitchlew and a Sikh gentleman whose name I cannot recall at present. We motored the whole day and after dusk we reached Bargari village where the Jatha was encamped. It was in Faridkot State territory.



After the evening meal in a tent which was put at our disposal, I visited the different tents where the Jatha was resting. All was very peaceful and orderly. I went back to my tent and about 10 p.m. I walked out again. I noticed that a religious service was being held and that about 2,000 villagers (from nearby places and also from Bargari village) were listening to the recitation of the Sikh scripture. I passed the night together with Mr. Gidwani and Dr. Kitchlew. These two gentlemen were with me all the time. They did not address the crowd and as I followed them step by step I can say that they held no conferences whatever with the Jatha. All three of us retired at the same time.

On the morning of 21 February we went out to see the village. I saw a number of policemen and officers near the camp. I went back to the place where the Jatha was encamped and looked very carefully over the whole body of men, Jatha and Sangat assembled there. I had the opportunity of observing practically the entire Jatha and the crowds accompanying the Jatha. I did not see anyone carrying fire-arms or any other weapons.

The recitation of what the Sikhs call *Asa-di-var* was over a little after 2 a.m. No speeches were delivered. By 11 o'clock the Jatha and Sangat took their meals at the nearby Gurdwara. About the same time I took another look around the open place where the Jatha was encamped and went into the interior of the village. Near the open space groups of good-humoured people were amusing themselves.

About twelve noon the Jatha started for Jaito. I suggested to Mr. Gidwani and Dr. Kitchlew that we might proceed in our motor ahead of the procession. First we walked for a mile and the car went ahead. On the way I noticed crowds of people waiting for the Jatha with refreshments and the others were clearing the road from branches and leaves. We entered the motor again and drove for nearly two miles. I again asked that the car be stopped that I may again observe the Jatha in their marching order and also those who were accompanying the Jatha.

I would estimate the crowd following the Jatha at about 7000 men and women of all ages and children. Those following the Jatha and the people who were waiting for the



arrival of the Jatha were shouting '*Sat Sri Akal*'. There was no element of disturbance anywhere.

As soon as the Jatha got near we got into the car again and drove ahead near the Nabha frontier. As yet none of us had entered the Nabha State. At the frontier there were a number of uniformed officers and one in plain clothes on horse back. One of them approached and asked us to stop the car. This request was immediately complied with. The officer handed over to Dr. Kitchlew a paper which Dr. Kitchlew read. It was an order from the Administrator for the Jatha. Dr. Kitchlew and Mr. Gidwani said that the paper was not meant for them because they did not belong to the Jatha. I stood up in the car and said, 'I am here merely as an observer'. The officer in plain clothes asked my name and galloped towards Jaito. That was the last I saw of him. While there had been no direct order stopping any of us from entering, I said that I should await the answer of the authorities, thinking all the time that the officer who had gallopped towards Nabha would bring back some word.

At 1.50 p.m. the Jatha passed into the Nabha State. No official presented to them the paper from the Administrator which was handed over to Dr. Kitchlew. In fact, by this time, there was no official at the frontier. The Jatha moved closely. The crowds were shouting '*Sat Sri Akal*'. The whole procession passed in front of me and again *I saw no one carrying fire-arms or weapons of any kind*. I saw the usual Sikh kirpan and about 500 in the crowd had sticks. That latter were of usual sort carried by farmers. We waited for some time on the Nabha frontier and then Mr. Gidwani sent a joint note to the Administrator asking him if we might proceed to Jaito. No answer came to this notice.

At 2.45 p.m. the first firing started. The firing was *in regular volley and there were no desultory shots*. This lasted for full two minutes, *i.e.*, from 2.45 to 2.47 p.m. At 2.55 p.m. I heard the second firing. It sounded like the first. It lasted till 2.58 p.m. that was all the firing I heard. None after and none before.

A short time after the second firing a young chap brought the news that there were many deaths and casualties and said that no arrangements had been made to take care of the



wounded. It was at this juncture that Dr. Kitchlew and Mr. Gidwani decided to motor to Jaito in order that they might take care of the wounded. Up to this time Mr. Gidwani has been saying to me that he would not enter the Nabha territory without permission from the authorities. Only after the bad news came of the wounded being left uncared for, he felt that it was his duty to go to help and to make adequate arrangements. I am convinced that had it not been for the news which aroused his concern for the wounded people, Mr. Gidwani would not have entered the state. I did not enter Nabha territory because while there was yet no order stopping me from entering, I was waiting to hear what the authorities had to say.

At about 3.20 p.m. a mounted officer, who told me that his name was Sardar Fateh Singh of Faridkot accompanied by six or seven policemen approached me at the boundary line of the Nabha and Faridkot territory where I was waiting. Sardar Fateh Singh enquired my name and asked me 'whether I still intended to enter Jaito'. I replied I wanted to enter Jaito and waited to hear from the authorities.

He replied that I 'was ordered to leave the State territory at once'.

'But', said I, 'I have not entered Nabha territory at all'. 'You are asked', said he in reply, 'to leave both Faridkot and Nabha territories at once'.

I then told Mr. Fateh Singh that I was waiting for the car.

'That is just out', said he 'I did not want to let you with indefinitely because the car will not return.'

I was then led by the officer in the direction of the Jaito railway station. We had walked only a few steps when I sighted the motor in which I had come. I said that I preferred to go back by car. The officer assented to this and asked me to sign a paper saying that I was leaving the State territory at once. This I did.

I asked the Sardar if he would tell me who was responsible for the order. He gave me no direct reply to this question. 'But,' said he, 'if you want to explain your position you had



better write a letter to Colonel Minchin, Agent of the Governor-General for the Panjab States.' I wrote the letter on the spot and handed it over to him.



## APPENDIX VII

### List of the Editors, Printers and Publishers of Newspapers Punished for their Sympathy with the Akalis

Teja Singh of *Gargaj Akali* fined Rs. 5,000/-, editor of *Daler Akali*, Amritsar, fined Rs. 500/-, editor, publisher and printer of the *Kiipan Bahadur* sentenced for 1½ years and fined Rs. 150/- each.

Jawala Singh, editor of the *Desh Sewak* fined Rs. 150/-.

Gopal Singh and Hari Singh, authors and printers of the poster '*Central Sikh League da chautha salana jalsa*'—sentenced to 2½ years' imprisonment and fine of Rs. 200/- each.

Sunder Singh sentenced to nine months' imprisonment for his book *Taze Zakham*.

Editor, printers and publishers of the *Babbar Sher* all sentenced to 1½ years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 100/- each.

Printer of *Omward*, sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200/-

Editor of *Gurdwara* sentenced to three years' imprisonment and fine of Rs. 200/-.

Owners of the *Khalsa Azad Agency* prosecuted.

Rattan Singh Azad sentenced to five years' transportation for his book *Baghi Sikh ke Sarkar*.

Gurbachan Singh Akali, editor of the *Babbar Sher* sentenced to three years' imprisonment and fine of Rs. 100/-.

Tara Singh sentenced to six months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200/- for his book, *Naukarshahi da daka te Nabhe di Pukar*

Proprietors of the following papers warned for their



sympathy with the Akali movement: *The Tribune*, *Kesri*, *Bande Matram*.

Proprietors of the following publishing and printing houses warned: Sud Press, Amritsar, Akali Press, Amritsar, Punjab Khalsa Press, Amritsar.



## APPENDIX VIII

### List of Newspapers in the Panjab that Supported the Akali Movement

<i>Name of the Paper</i>	<i>Editor</i>	<i>Place of Publication</i>
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#### ENGLISH

<i>The Tribune</i>	Kalinath Ray	Lahore
<i>The Nation</i>	Mohinder Singh	Lahore
<i>The Onward</i>	Swami Onkarnand	Lahore
<i>The Liberal</i>	—	Amritsar

#### URDU

<i>The Akali</i>	Sardul Singh	Amritsar
<i>Bande Matram</i>	Mela Ram Wafa	Lahore
<i>Darpan</i>	Mulk Raj	Lahore
<i>Desh</i>	Dina Nath	Lahore
<i>Kesri</i>	Lachhman Singh	Lahore
<i>Milap</i>	Khushal Chand	Lahore
<i>Nusrat</i>	F.M. Khurshaid	Lahore
<i>Pratap</i>	Radha Kishan	Lahore
<i>Zamindar</i>	Ghulam Rasul	Lahore
<i>Loyal Gazette</i>	Ram Singh	Lahore
<i>Shaheed</i>	Thakur Singh	Lahore
<i>Vakil</i>	Abdul Karim	Amritsar



<i>Gurdwara</i>	Gurmukh Singh	Amritsar
<i>Pendu</i>	Sultan Mehmud	Amritsar

## GURMUKHI

<i>Akali te Pardesi</i>	Mangal Singh	Amritsar
<i>Ranjit</i>	—	Amritsar
<i>Ajit</i>	—	Amritsar
<i>Babbar Sher</i>	Gurbachan Singh	Amritsar
<i>Khalsa</i>	Bagh Singh	Amritsar
<i>Qaumi Dard</i>	Kapur Singh	Amritsar
<i>Desh Sewak</i>	Jawala Singh	Amritsar
<i>Khalsa Akhbar</i>	—	Amritsar
<i>Khalsa Samachar</i>	—	Amritsar
<i>Khalsa Advocate</i>	Bhai Jodh Singh	Amritsar
<i>Nirol Khalsa</i>	—	Amritsar

## HINDI

<i>Akashvani</i>	Lala Jagat Narain	Lahore
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Since files of most of these papers were not preserved or could not be traced, I have quoted these papers from the Native Press Abstracts at the National Archives of India, New Delhi.



## APPENDIX IX

### List of Newspapers in the Panjab that Opposed the Akali Movement

<i>Name of the Paper</i>	<i>Editor</i>	<i>Place of Publication</i>
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#### ENGLISH

<i>The Civil and Military</i>		
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<i>Gazette</i>	K.H. Hardy	Lahore
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<i>The Panjab Gazette</i>	—	Lahore
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<i>The Panjab Chronicle</i>	J.A. Gillan	Amritsar
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#### URDU

<i>Paisa Akhbar</i>	Mehbub Alam	Lahore
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<i>Updeshak</i>	Munshi Ram Sewak	Lahore
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<i>Khwaja</i>	Khwaja Mohd. Ziaullah	Amritsar
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#### GURMUKHI

<i>Sant Samachar</i>	Narankar Singh	Lahore
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<i>Satjug</i>	—	Lahore
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<i>Dharamvir</i>	—	Lahore
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## APPENDIX X

### ANANDPUR SAHIB RESOLUTION

*Policy and Programme of The Shiromani Akali Dal adopted at  
Sri Anandpur Sahib on October 16-17, 1973*

#### **(A) Principles**

- (i) The Shiromani Akali Dal is the supreme body of the Sikh Panth and as such is fully authorised to represent and lead them. The basis of this organisation depends on mutual relation, aspirations of man and his relations with the Creator.
- (ii) These principles are embodied in the doctrines of Guru Nanak Dev viz. Nam Japo (God Worship), Kirat Karo (Do hard labour) and Wand Chhako (share your hard earnings with others).

#### **(B) Aims**

The Shiromani Akali Dal shall strive for the fulfilment of the following aims:

- (i) Propagation of Religion and Sikh tenets and condemnation of atheism;
- (ii) Maintaining the realisation of Panth's independent entity and creation of such an environment where Sikh sentiment can find its full expression;
- (iii) Eradication of poverty and hunger through an equitable economic structure—increase in wealth and end of all exploitation;
- (iv) Removal of illiteracy, untouchability and casteism as laid down in Sikh scriptures;
- (v) Ending ill-health and sickness—condemnation of intoxicants—so that the community is inspired to protect Nation.



**PART-I**

The Shiromani Akali Dal considers it a primary task to inculcate a sense of Divinity among the Sikhs so that they are proud of being the same. In order to accomplish the same, the Akali Dal will initiate the following programme:

- (a) Preaching the oneness of God, worship, belief in the Ten Gurus and the Holy Granth, and information about the doctrines explained by them for implementation by the Sikhs;
- (b) For the successful preaching of Sikh Divinity, philosophy, tenets and kirtan etc. protection of good preachers, singers, Dhadis and poets from Sikh Missionary Colleges so that preachers are able to propagate freely in India and abroad, villages and cities, schools and colleges etc.;
- (c) The work of Amrit Parchar (Baptism) to be undertaken at a large scale, particularly among the schools and colleges. Study circles of college professors and students to be organised for this purpose;
- (d) Revival of Daswandh (donation of 1/10th of income) among the Sikhs;
- (e) Respect, and honour the Sikh historians, intellectuals, writers, Parcharaks, Granthis etc. and provide facilities to raise the standard of their life, training and work;
- (f) In order to streamline the Gurdwara administration, arrangements to be made for the training of employees, maintenance of Gurdwara buildings and issuing of necessary directives to the S.G.P.C. members in this behalf;
- (g) Correct printing of scriptures, research of old and new Sikh History, translation of scriptures and preparation of clean literature of Sikh principles;
- (h) Strive for the enactment of new All India Gurdwara Act under which all gurdwaras in the country are managed efficiently and endeavour that old institutions of the Sikhs like Udasis, Nirmale etc. become an integral part of the Sikh society;
- (i) The Managers of all Gurdwaras in the world to be



- woven in a single chain in order to have effective benefits of the common means of religious propaganda;
- (j) To secure "Open Darshan" of Sri Nankana Sahib and other Gurdwaras which have been snatched away from the panth.

## PART-II

### Political

The panthic political aim is definitely based on the directives of the Tenth Guru, which is engraved on the pages of Sikhs History and is in the mind of the Khalsa Panth—Its aim is, *Khalsa Ji Ka Bol Bala*.

To this end in view, the Shiromani Akali Dal will strive and wage struggles for the following:

1. (a) The areas which have been taken away from Punjab or have been intentionally kept apart, e.g., Dalhousie from district Gurdaspur; Chadigarh; Pinjore, Kalka and Ambala City in district Ambala; whole Una Tehsil of Hoshiarpur district, "Desh" ilaqa of Nalagah, Shahabad block of district Karnal, Sub Tehsils of Guhla and Tohana, Rattia Block of district Hissar and Sirsa Tehsil, 6 Tehsils of district Ganganagar of Rajasthan and the contiguous Punjabi-speaking Sikh-populated areas, should be immediately merged with Panjab under one administrative unit:
  - (b) In this new Panjab, the Central intervention should be restricted to Defence, Foreign Affairs, Post and Telegraphs, Currency and Railways. The rest of the departments should be under the direct control of Panjab:
  - (c) Effective arrangements should be made to safeguard the interest of the minority Sikh community living outside Panjab, so that they do not fall a prey to any discrimination.
2. Shiromani Akali Dal will also try that the Indian Constitution becomes Federal in the real sense and all states are equally represented at the Centre.



3. The Shiromani Akali Dal feels that the foreign policy of the Congress Government is useless and harmful for the country and the Nation as a whole. It will strive for good relations with all neighbouring countries, particularly where the Sikhs reside or where their religious shrines are found. Our foreign policy should not be tagged along with any other country.
4. To ensure justice for Sikh employees at the Centre and States and to raise effective voice against injustice, meted out to them, is an important part of the Shiromani Akali Dal's programme. Particularly in the Defence Services, efforts will be made to maintain the conventions of the Sikhs and the demands of Sikh soldiers would be constantly kept in view. Shiromani Akali Dal will also try that the "Kirpan" (sword) becomes an integral part of Sikh soldiers' uniform:
5. Creation of favourable atmosphere for the rehabilitation of ex-serviceman, provision of necessary concessions and safeguards for their rights so that they live a life of self-respect.
6. The Shiromani Akali Dal feels that every man or woman, who has not been sentenced by a Court of law should be allowed to keep a fire-arm without license;
7. The Shiromani Akali Dal favours a policy of prohibition and ban on smoking at public places.

**ECONOMIC POLICY AND PROGRAMME OF SHIROMANI  
AKALI DAL AS APPROVED BY THE WORKING  
COMMITTEE IN ITS MEETING HELD AT SHRI  
ANANDPUPR SAHIB ON 17TH OCTOBER, 1973**

Though Indian economy is essentially an agrarian economy and no political force which is committed to building of a social order based on justice can ignore this, the crux of the whole problem is that the main lever of economy are in the hands of the big business, the capitalist and the monopolist class. It is precisely this class which has grown rich during 26 years of freedom though benefits of economic growth have been shared by other classes too. It is this class which essentially wields political powers. Therefore, any effort of



building a new social order through peaceful means has to be directed in breaking the stronghold of this section of the population both on economy and politics.

The Akali Dal stands for removal of disparity between the rich and the poor, both in urban and rural areas. It, however, wants that the first attack on the concentration of wealth should be made on those who really control the economy. In the rural areas too the Akali Dal stands for the weaker sections of the population, scheduled castes, backward landless tillers, poor peasants and middle peasants. It therefore, stands for rationalisation of land legislation in such a manner that all lands of above 30 standard acres should be taken over and distributed among the rural poor.

The economic policy of the Akali Dal, therefore, would mainly be directed to achieve these objectives.

## **2. Agrarian Sector**

In the agrarian sector, the country has witnessed a series of land reforms on one hand and on the other hand a new phase of green revolution. The Akali Dal is pledged to stipulate the green revolution on one hand and to ensure that increase in Agricultural production leads to the improvement in the standard of living of all sections of the rural population, particularly the middle peasants and poor and landless population. To achieve this end the Akali Dal proposes to take in the coming period following measures:

- (a) Initiate land reform measures to remove disparity and to increase Agricultural produce. The existing legislation regarding ceiling on land would be reviewed and a ceiling of 30 standard acres per family be fixed. All remaining intermediaries on the land would be abolished and real security of tenure to actual tillers conferred. Landless agricultural labour and poor peasants would be settled on surplus lands and Government waste cultivable land would be distributed to the landless, preferably to the persons belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The scheme for distribution of these lands would be evolved in such a manner that poor section of Harijans and landless



- population benefit from it. Along with these, the Akalis Dal would also examine how the tenants can be given the right to mortgage their interests in land for obtaining credit and how restrictions can be placed on sale of lands given by Government to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes in favour of others;
- (b) The Akali Dal will also strive for the modernisation of agriculture so that the middle, small and poor peasants too can benefit from cheap in-puts like electricity, water, seeds, fertilizers and credit through co-operatives and other public Agencies.
  - (c) The Akali Dal shall strive that agricultural prices are fixed on the basis of the cost of production of the average farmer. Prices should be declared well in advance of the sowing period. State Government shall have the authority to fix the price.
  - (d) The Akali Dal stands for complete State Trading in foodgrains and steps would be taken to facilitate take over of wholesale trade in foodgrains and other agricultural produce by the State Government and Government Agencies.
  - (e) The Akali Dal is against all type of food Zones and restrictions placed on the Movement of Agriculture produce in the country. The whole country be treated as a single Food Zone.
  - (f) Special efforts will be made to complete Thein Dam and Bhatinda Thermal Plant, so that irrigation facilities and Electricity is augmented in the State and ultimately made more cheap. A concerted effort shall be made to set up an atomic electricity plant.
  - (g) Service co-operatives should be built up in rural areas and special attention should be paid to development of minor irrigation projects in those districts where canal irrigation is not available.

### **Industry**

The Akali Dal demands that all basic industries should be brought under the public sector. The Akali Dal wants that all consumer industries dealing with essential commodities be



nationalised so as to keep the price level under control and to end the exploitation of the poor consumer by the industrialists and the middle man.

Public Sector industries should be set up in such a manner as to remove the regional imbalances which have been created as a consequence of discriminatory policies of the Central Government.

A planned effort be made to develop agro-based industries in the rural areas so as to relieve the pressure on population on the land. The management of industries be democratised to include 50% representatives of the workers on the management and a detailed scheme be brought under the public sector. The Akali Dal is committed for progressive nationalisation of transport.

Public Sector projects should be given more autonomy and manned by young competent persons committed to the project and special efforts should be made to build up a cadre of public sector project.

### **Fiscal Policy**

The Akali Dal demands the review of the whole taxation structures in such a manner so that incentives for tax evasion and black money are totally eradicated. The Akali Dal stands for such taxation system whose incidence of the tax would be direct and could not be transmitted to general mass of the people. The present taxation simply penalises the poor and provides big loop-holes to the rich. The Akali Dal stands for demonetisation of the currency in order to destroy the parallel black money economy in the country.

### **4. Workers, Middle Class Employees & Agricultural Workers**

The Akali Dal would strive for:

- (a) need based minimum wage for the industrial workers;
- (b) continued improvement in the standard of living of the Government employees;
- (c) minimum wages for agricultural workers to be reviewed and if necessary, increased;
- (d) plug loop-holes in the existing labour Legislation to ensure decent living conditions for the workers;



- (e) execute urgent measures for increasing housing accommodation, both in the urban and rural areas, for the lowest rungs of the Society.

## **5. Unemployment**

The Akali Dal stands for total employment in the country. To start with, it feels, it is the duty of the Government to provide jobs immediately, at least to all the educated and skilled people. Till the jobs are not provided, unemployment allowance be provided to be shared on 50:50 basis between the Centre and the State Governments at the following rates:

Matriculate & skilled workers	Rs. 50/- per month
B.A. . .	Rs. 75/- „
M.A. . .	Rs. 100/- „
Professional Engineers & Doctors	Rs. 150/- „
Skilled persons . .	Rs. 50/- „

provide old age pension to all deserving persons beyond the age of 65.

## **6. Scheduled Castes and Weaker Sections of Society**

Akali Dal will strive to raise the economic standard of the Scheduled Castes and other Weaker Sections of Society by providing them educational facilities, employment and other concessions so as to bring them at par with the advanced sections of society. These classes will be provided foodgrains at subsidised rates.



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*Emerson Papers:* Sir H.W. Emerson, Assistant Commissioner and later Governor of the Panjab, mainly responsible for the drafting of the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill of 1925 along with Mr. F.H. Puckle.\* Letters, newspapers cuttings, etc., in the collection of his son Mr. H.G. Emerson, London.

*Curry Papers:* Papers of Mr. J.C. Curry, Deputy Commissioner of Sheikhupura at the time of the tragedy of Nankana in 1921, reports about the Nankana tragedy and other police and C.I.D. reports.

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*Nehru Papers:* Private Papers of Jawaharlal Nehru, General Secretary of the Congress during the days of the Akali Movement, particularly the Miscellaneous and Prison Papers and the correspondence of the Akali Sahayak Bureau, Amritsar. Most of these papers have since been

\* In spite of my best efforts I could not get access to the Private Papers of Mr. F.H. Puckle (who drafted the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill of 1925 alongwith Mr. H.W. Emerson) in the possession of Lady Puckle at Oxford, U K., due to the indifferent health of the lady.



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*Caveeshar Papers*: Private Papers of Sardul Singh Caveeshar, an extremist and non-cooperator, in the collection of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

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